

Image and Incarnation

Intersections

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Image and Incarnation

The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image

Edited by

Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel



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Contents

Acknowledgments	IX
Notes on the Editors	X
Notes on the Contributors	XI
List of Illustrations	XVII

Introduction	1
<i>Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel</i>	

PART 1 *Representing the Mystery of the Incarnation*

- 1 Medietas / Mediator and the Geometry of Incarnation 17
Herbert L. Kessler
- 2 Mute Mysteries of the Divine Logos: On the Pictorial Poetics of Incarnation 76
Klaus Krüger
- 3 A Meaty Incarnation: Making Sense of Divine Flesh for Aztec Christians 109
Jaime Lara
- 4 The Ineffability of Incarnation in Le Brun's *Silence* or *Sleep of the Child* 137
Matthieu Somon

PART 2 *Imago Dei and the Incarnate Word*

- 5 Thomas Aquinas, Sacramental Scenes, and the 'Aesthetics' of Incarnation 161
Mark D. Jordan
- 6 The Poetics of the Image in Late Medieval Mysticism 173
Niklaus Largier

- 7 Incarnation, Image, and Sign: John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & Late Medieval Visual Culture 187
Lee Palmer Wandel
- 8 Eye to Eye, Text to Image? Jan Provoost's *Sacred Allegory*, Jan van Ruusbroec's *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, and Mystical Contemplation in the Late Medieval Low Countries 203
Geert Warnar
- 9 'A Just Proportion of Body and Soul': Emblems and Incarnational Grafting 231
Christopher Wild

PART 3

Literary Figurations of the Incarnation

- 10 From Negative Painting to Loving Imprint in Pierre De Bérulle's *Discours* (1623) 253
Agnès Guiderdoni
- 11 Discerning Vision: Cognitive Strategies in Cornelis Everaert's *Mary Compared to the Light* (ca. 1511) 264
Bart Ramakers
- 12 The Fountain of Life in Molinet's *Roman de la rose moralisé* (1500) 313
Michael Randall

PART 4

Transformative Analogies of Matter and Spirit

- 13 Figuring the Threshold of Incarnation: Caravaggio's Incarnate Image of the *Madonna of Loreto* 341
Ralph Dekoninck
- 14 Super-Entanglement: Unfolding Evidence in Hieronymus Bosch's *Mass of St. Gregory* 371
Reindert Falkenburg

- 15 **The Mystery of the Incarnation and the Art of Painting** 397
 Dalia Judovitz
- 16 **Convent and *Cubiculum Cordis*: The Incarnational Thematic of Materiality in the Cistercian Prayerbook of Martin Boschman (1610)** 413
 Walter S. Melion

PART 5

Visualizing the Flesh of Christ

- 17 **Dieu le Père en Vierge Marie. La Trinité – Pietà de Rubens** 461
 Colette Nativel
- 18 **Images of the Incarnation in the Jesuit Japan Mission's Kirishitanban Story of Virgin Martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria** 489
 Haruko Nawata Ward

Index Nominum 511

Acknowledgments

The essays gathered in *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image* originated as papers delivered at three colloquia sponsored by Emory's Art History Department and Office of the Provost: "Incarnation Doctrine and Art Theory", "Illustrating and Elucidating the Mystery of the Incarnation through Images", and "The Visual Poetics of Incarnation in Theology and Literature". For her generous support of these colloquia, which convened in Spring and Fall 2013, we owe a debt of thanks to Dr. Claire Sterk, Provost of Emory University. Prof. Steve Everett, former Chair of the Committee for Faculty Development and Excellence, provided an additional subvention. For her invaluable administrative assistance, we are very grateful to Kathleen Carroll, Academic Degree Programs Coordinator in Graduate Studies, who ably facilitated every aspect of these colloquia. Frank Jackson, Visual Resources Librarian, and Becky Baldwin, Library Assistant, supplied technical expertise and helped to prepare some of the illustrations for this volume. Dr. Jan Love, Dean of the Candler School of Theology, Dr. Bonnie Speed, Director of the Michael C. Carlos Museum, and Elizabeth Hornor, Marguerite Colville Ingram Director of Education, kindly allowed us to use their excellent facilities. Prof. Vernon Robbins of the Department of Religion, and Profs. Jean Campbell, Sarah McPhee, and Elizabeth Pastan of the Art History Department, ensured the success of the colloquia through their enthusiastic participation. Last but certainly not least, we want to acknowledge the essential services rendered by our gifted research assistant Edward Koshnick Besse, without whom this volume would not have seen the light of day.

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Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien (2001); he has also written a multitude of articles on a vast field of topics, e.g., “Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy” (2007), “Un’immagine inconcepibile: la Medusa di Caravaggio” (2007), “Tristan—Love: Elite Self-Fashioning in Italian Frescoes of the 13th and 14th Centuries” (2011); and “The Visual Presence of Remembrance: The Image as Palimpsest” (2013).

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List of Illustrations

- 1.1 *Christ Raising the Host* (11th century). Stone bas-relief. Rodez, Musée Fenaille. Image © Bridgeman Images 18
- 1.2 *Altar*. Rodez, cathédrale (reconstruction by Bousquet) 19
- 1.3 *Majestas Domini* (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 329^v 20
- 1.4 “In principio” initial (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 9^r 23
- 1.5 *Majestas Domini* (ca. 830). Manuscript illumination. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB 11 40; fol. 1^v 24
- 1.6 *Majestas Domini* (ca. 850). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 9385, fol. 179^v 26
- 1.7 *Majestas Domini* (849). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 266, fol. 2^v 27
- 1.8 *Majestas Domini* (ca. 870). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1141, fol. 6^r 28
- 1.9 *Trinity*. Manuscript illumination. London, BL, Add. MS. 49598, fol. 70^r. Image courtesy of The British Library Board 29
- 1.10 *Majestas Domini*. Manuscript illumination. Auxerre, on deposit in the Bibliothèque Municipale 30
- 1.11 *Gospels as Fountain of Life* (ca. 835). Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathédrale, trésor, fol. 1^r 33
- 1.12 *Gospels as Fountain of Life* (ca. 835). Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathédrale, trésor, fol. 2^r 34
- 1.13 *Majestas Agni* (ca. 835). Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathédrale, trésor fol. 3^r 35
- 1.14 *Paradise* (976). Manuscript illumination. Escorial, MS. D.1.2, fol. 17^v 37
- 1.15 *Majestas Domini* (976). Manuscript illumination. Escorial, MS. D.1.2, fol. 16^v 38
- 1.16 *Cosmological Map* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 387, fol. 134^r 40
- 1.17 *Denarius of Charles the Bald* (9th century). Coin. Munich, Staatliche Münzsammlung München 41
- 1.18 “Genesis” initial (ca. 840). Manuscript illumination. Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Cod. Car CI, fol. 6^r 42
- 1.19 *Opening of John’s Gospel* (849). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 266, fol. 172^r 43
- 1.20 *Majestas Poem* (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 329^r 45

- 1.21 *Illustration of Boethius' De arithmetica* (ca. 845). Manuscript illumination. Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Class. 5 [H J IV 12]], fol. 28^r 46
- 1.22 *Hosts Diagram* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Vatican, BAV, Cod. lat. 1341, fol. 188^r 47
- 1.23 *Cosmological Diagram* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Laon, Bib. mun., MS 422, fol. 34^r 48
- 1.24 *Host* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 2855, fol. 63^v 50
- 1.25 *Circles* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 2855, fol. 63^r 51
- 1.26 *Crucifixion* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Vatican, BAV Cod. Reg. lat. 124, fol. 8^v 54
- 1.27 *David* (ca. 850). Ivory. Florence, Museo del Bargello. Detail. Author's archive 56
- 1.28 *Hand of God Holding Host* (ca. 875). Manuscript illumination. Tours, Bibliothèque municipale, MS. 184, fol. 2^r 58
- 1.29 *Host Press* (12th century). Iron. Vic, Museu Episcopale 60
- 1.30 *Hosts* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Paris, MS lat. 2855, fol. 66^v 61
- 1.31 *Imitation Coins* (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 1^v 62
- 1.32 "*Majestas Domini*" (ca. 1100). Stone bas-relief. Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert, Musée Lapidaire. Image courtesy of Daniel Kuentz 66
- 1.33 *Diagrams* (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Valenciennes Bibliothèque municipale, MS 293, fol. 54^r 68
- 1.34 *Initial of First Epistle of John* (ca. 840). Manuscript illumination. London, BL MS Add. 10546, fol. 406^r. Image courtesy of The British Library Board 69
- 1.35 *Majestas Domini* (last quarter, 10th century). Manuscript illumination. Koblenz, Landeshauptarchiv, Ms. 701/81, fol. 127^r 73
- 2.1 Antonello da Messina, *Virgin Annunciate* (ca. 1475–76). Oil on wood, 45 × 34,5 cm. Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia. Image © bpk | Scala 77
- 2.2 Matthias Stomer, *Annunciation* (ca. 1630–32). Oil on canvas, 117 × 171,5 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Image ©Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien mit MVK und OETM 80
- 2.3 Simone Martini, *Annunciation*, detail with the Angel Gabriel saying 'Ave' (1333). Tempera and gold on wood, 184 × 210 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. Image © bpk | Scala 81
- 2.4 Unknown master, *Annunciation through the Ear* (ca. 1400). Stone carving. Würzburg, Chapel of Mary, northern portal. Image © Author 83

- 2.5 Sandro Botticelli (workshop), *Annunciation* (ca. 1495). Tempera on wood, 36,5 × 35 cm. Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum. Image © Landesmuseum Hannover 85
- 2.6 Fra Angelico, *Annunciation* (ca. 1442–43). Fresco, 230 × 321 cm. Florence, Convent of San Marco. Image © bpk | Scala 85
- 2.7 Antonello da Messina, *Virgin Annunciate* (ca. 1474). Oil on wood, 43 cm × 32 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. Image © Alte Pinakothek / Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen 87
- 2.8 Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, *Virgin Annunciate* (ca. 1385–1390). Tempera on wood, 80 × 45 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. Image © Alte Pinakothek / Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen 88
- 2.9 Unknown artist after Leonardo da Vinci, *Angel of the Annunciation* (ca. 1510–1520). Oil on wood, 75 × 53,4 cm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford 90
- 2.10 Leonardo da Vinci, *St. John the Baptist* (ca. 1513–1516). Oil on wood, 69 × 57 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Image © bpk | RMN – Grand Palais | Stéphane Maréchalle 91
- 2.11 Annibale Carracci (attr.), *Angel of the Annunciation* (late 16th cent.). Oil on canvas, 249 × 212 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé. Image © bpk | RMN – Grand Palais | René-Gabriel Ojéda | Franck Raux 92
- 2.12 Sebastiano Carello, *St. Catherine of Siena and St. John the Baptist before a painting of the Annunciation* (ca. 1645). Savigliano, Museo Civico. Image © Archivio fotografico Museo Civico A.Olmo, Savigliano (CN), N.ro inv.232 95
- 2.13 Giovanni Venanzi, *St. Nicholas and St. Barbara before a painting of the Annunciation* (1667). Parma, Museo Diocesano. Image © Rome Istituto central per il Catalogo e la Documentazione 96
- 2.14 Unknown artist, *Miraculous image of the Annunciation* (14th cent.). Fresco. Florence, SS. Annunziata. Image © Author 100
- 2.15 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Cappella Fonseca* (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina. Image © Author 101
- 2.16 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Cappella Fonseca*, detail with the altar painting of the *Annunciation* after Guido Reni (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina. Image © Author 102
- 2.17 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Cappella Fonseca*, detail with the portrait bust of the donor Gabriele Fonseca (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina. Image © Author 103
- 2.18 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Cappella Fonseca*, detail with an angel holding the altar painting of the *Annunciation* after Guido Reni (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina. Image © Author 104

- 3.1 The *Florentine Codex*, book 2. Aztec human sacrifice. From Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas*, ed. Paso y Troncoso, 1905. Public domain 113
- 3.2 Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica christiana*, 1579. Franciscan friar preaching with pictures. The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University 117
- 3.3 Anonymous, Cloister mural of the Annunciation (c. 1560). Ex-convento de San Juan Bautista, Cuauhtinchan, Puebla. Photo: J. Lara 119
- 3.4 The *Florentine Codex*, book 2. Aztec eagle and jaguar knights. From Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas*, ed. Paso y Troncoso, 1905. Public domain 119
- 3.5 Portico confessional area with mural of the Last Judgment (late 16th century). Ex-convento de Santa María Magdalena, Cuitzeo, Michoacán. Photo: J. Lara 121
- 3.6 Anonymous, Crucifix made from corn husks and corn paste (mid-16th century). Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Zacatecas. Photo: J. Lara 123
- 3.7 Anonymous, Stone atrial cross with plumed terminations, stars, and the instruments of the Passion (16th century). Iglesia de San Jerónimo, Huandacareo, Michoacán. Photo: J. Lara 125
- 3.8 Anonymous, *Salvator Mundi* (16th century). Feather mosaic, 81 × 71 cm. Photo: Museo Nacional del Virreinato INAH. Used with permission 126
- 3.9 *Codex Tlalelloco*, MS 35–39, almanac for the year 1565. Photo: Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City. Used with permission 127
- 3.10 *Codex Tlalelloco*, MS 35–39, almanac for the year 1562. Photo: Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City. Used with permission 128
- 3.11 Anonymous, Mural painting of the eagle nursing its young with its blood (16th century). Iglesia del Divino Salvador, Malinalco, Morelos. Photo: courtesy of Manuel Aguilar 129
- 3.12 Anonymous, Mural painting of the sacred eagle holding a pennant, with corn crucifix below. (16th century). Iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel, Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo. Photo: J. Lara 130
- 3.13 Anonymous, Ceiling painting of the solar eagle above the high altar (16th century). Ixmiquilpan. Photo: J. Lara 131
- 3.14 Anonymous, Stone atrial cross with obsidian mirror insert, flowers and blood glyphs (16th century). Iglesia de San José, Ciudad Hidalgo, Michoacán. Photo: J. Lara 133
- 3.15 Reused Aztec *cuauhxicalli* vessel inserted at the base of the atrial cross (after 1585). Iglesia de Santa María Nativitas, Mexico City. Photo: Courtesy of Colectivo Tollan 134

- 4.1 Charles Le Brun, *Silence or Sleep of the Child* (ca. 1655). Oil on canvas, 87 × 118 cm. Paris, Louvre museum 137
- 4.2 Giulio Bonasone after Michelangelo, *Madonna del Silenzio* (1561). Engraving, 40,2 × 26,8 cm. Private collection 140
- 4.3 Domenichino, *Madonna del Silenzio*. Oil on canvas, 50,8 × 68,6 cm (ca. 1598–1600). Hampton Court, collection of Her Majesty the Queen of England 141
- 4.4 Annibale Carracci, *Madonna del Silenzio* (ca. 1605). Oil on canvas, 38 × 47 cm. Paris, Louvre 141
- 4.5 Marck Quirin, after Luca Giordano, *La Sainte Vierge* (1774). Engraving, 22 × 24 cm. Private collection 142
- 4.6 Nicolas Poussin, *Holy Family or Madonna on the Stairs* (ca. 1648). Oil on canvas, 118 × 197 cm. Cleveland, Museum of Arts 143
- 4.7 Nicolas Poussin, *Holy Family* (ca. 1651). Oil on canvas, 96,5 × 133 cm. Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum 143
- 4.8 Nicolas de Poilly, after Charles Le Brun, *The Silence* (ca. 1675–1693). Engraving. Private collection 148
- 4.9 Charles Le Brun, *La mort du Cardinal de Bérulle pendant l'office* (ca. 1644). Engraving to *La vie du Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle instituteur et premier Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de l'Oratoire de IESUS-CHRIST nostre Seigneur par GERMAIN HABERT, Abbé de Cerisy* (Paris, Iean Camusat et Pierre Le Petit: 1646), frontispiece. Private collection 149
- 7.1 Nicholas Froment, "Madonna and Child appearing to Moses", central panel, *Triptych of the Burning Bush* (or *Buisson Ardent*) (ca. 1475). Cathédrale Saint Sauveur Aix-en-Provence. Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY 188
- 7.2 *The Godly Mill*, © Ulmer Museum / Photo: Ingeborg Schmatz, Ulm 190
- 8.1 Jan Provoost, *Sacred Allegory*. Oil on wood, 50.5 × 40 cm, Louvre, Paris 204
- 8.2 Jan Provoost, *Last Judgement*. Groeningemuseum, Bruges 207
- 8.3 Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait*. Oil on lime panel, 67,1 × 48,7 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich 211
- 8.4 Hans Memling, *Christ Blessing*. Oil on oak panel, 34,8 × 26,2 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 212
- 8.5 Gerard David, *Christ Blessing*. Oil on wood, 12,1 × 8,9 cm, The Cloisters, New York 213
- 8.6 Jan Provoost, *Death and the Miser*. Groeningemuseum, Bruges 226
- 9.1 Majuscule in Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Endter: 1644), vol. IV, 173. Engraving. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich 239

- 9.2 Frontispiece in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Des Allerheiligst- und Allerheilsamsten Leidens und Sterbens Jesu Christi Zwölf andächtige Betrachtungen* (Nuremberg, Johann Hofmann: 1672), fol. 2 verso & 3 recto. Printed text & engraving. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich 245
- 9.3 Pattern poem in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Geistliche Sonette, Lieder und Gedichte zu gottseeligem Zeitvertreib* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Endter: 1662) 403. Print Collection, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel 247
- 11.1 *Mary in the Sun*, woodcut illustration to *Een suuerlic boecxken van onser liever Vrouwen croon* (Leiden: Jan Seversz., after 1513), The Hague, Royal Library: 228 G 1, f. A1v. Image © ProQuest LLC 304
- 12.1 School of Jan van Eyck, "The Fountain of Life" (1430). Oil on wood, 181 × 119 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado 319
- 13.1 Caravaggio, *Madonna dei Pellegrini* (ca. 1605–1606). Oil on canvas, 260 × 150 cm. Rome, Sant'Agostino 342
- 13.2 Melchior Haffner, Frontispiece to Gumpffenberg W., *Atlas Marianus* (Munich, J. Jaecklin: 1672) 344
- 13.3 Maestro di Fiastra, *The Santa Casa*, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on canvas, 165 × 150 cm. Fiastra, Oratorio di San Rocco 347
- 13.4 *Madonna of Loreto*, wood sculpture, end of the 14th century (destroyed in 1921) 348
- 13.5 Maestro di Domo, *Virgin and Child*, central panel of a triptych (mid 15th century). Tempera on wood. Serra San Quirico, Chiesa di San Paterniano 350
- 13.6 Nicolò Trometta (attributed to), *Madonna of Loreto* (beginning 17th century). Oil on canvas, 242 × 154 cm. Urbania, Museo civico 351
- 13.7 Model of the Santa Casa (17th century). Montalto Marche, Duomo 352
- 13.8 Model of the Santa Casa (17th century). Sant'Angelo in Vado, Chiesa di San Filippo 353
- 13.9 Antoon III Wierix, *Imaginaria visio* (ca. 1620). Engraving, 11,4 × 7 cm. Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium 358
- 13.10 Michele Tosini, *The Virgin of Loreto* (ca. 1560). Oil on canvas, 251 × 193 cm. Prato, Monastero di San Vincenzo, Cappella della Madonna di Loreto 362
- 13.11 Jacopo Sansovino, *Madonna del Parto* (1518). Marble. Sant'Agostino, Rome 364
- 13.12 Antoine Lafréry, *Madonna of Loreto* (late 16th century). Engraving. Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Rome 365
- 13.13 Guercino, *St. Bernard of Siena and St. Francis of Assisi with the Madonna of Loreto*. Oil on canvas, 239 × 149 cm. Cento, Pinacoteca civica 366

- 14.1 Hieronymus Bosch, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the *Epiphany Triptych* (ca. 1505). Oil on wood, 138 × 72 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum 372
- 14.2 Israhel van Meckenem, *Mass of St. Gregory* (ca. 1490–1495). Engraving, 464 × 295 mm. Washington, National Gallery of Art 374
- 14.3 Master IAM of Zwolle, *Mass of St. Gregory* (ca. 1500). Engraving, 323 × 224 mm. Munich, Bayerische Grafische Sammlung 375
- 14.4 Master of the Aachen Altarpiece, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the *Crucifixion Triptych* (ca. 1492–95). Oil and tempera on wood, 107 × 54 cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery 377
- 14.5 Master of the Bartholomew Altar, *Mass of St. Gregory* (ca. 1500–1505). Oil on wood, 28 × 19,5 cm. Trier, Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözanmuseum 378
- 14.6 Hieronymus Bosch, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the *Epiphany Triptych* (ca. 1505). Oil on wood, 138 × 72 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum. Detail 379
- 14.7 Adriaen Isenbrandt, *Mass of St. Gregory* (1st half 16th century). Oil on canvas, 72 × 56 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum 381
- 14.8 Anonymous, "Crucifixion", interior of *Passion Retable* (ca. 1510–1520). Polychromed wood, 227 × 230 × 32 cm. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Detail 386
- 14.9 Rogier van der Weyden (follower), "Mount Calvary", interior of *Passion Retable* (1466). Polychromed wood (oil on wood, side panels), 560 × 140 cm. Ambierle, St. Martin Church. Detail 387
- 14.10 Tilman Riemenschneider, *Corpus Christi Altar* (1505–1510). Wood (fir; limewood), 930 × 373 cm. Creglingen, Herrgottskirche 389
- 15.1 Georges de La Tour, *The Newborn Child* (ca. 1645). Oil on canvas, 76 × 91 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes 398
- 15.2 Georges de La Tour, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (ca. 1645). Oil on canvas, 131 × 107 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris 402
- 16.1 Martin Boschman, Title-Page, *Paradisus precum selectarum quibus devota anima sese oblectari in dies poterit* (Pelplin, Gdańsk, Antwerp, or Brussels: ca. 1610). Pen and ink in shades of brown and red, 122 × 78 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 414
- 16.2 Frontispiece, "In hoc signum vinces", in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 1 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 78 × 64 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 418
- 16.3 Anonymous, *Infant Jesus with the Arma Passionis*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 31 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 23 × 18 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 421
- 16.4 Hieronymus Wierix, *Ecce Homo*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 50 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 89 × 60 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 423

- 16.5 Hieronymus Wierix, *Mirror of Penitence*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 67 verso. Engraving (bound-in), 86 × 63 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 425
- 16.6 Anonymous, *Pietà*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 110 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 27 × 20 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 428
- 16.7 Anonymous, *Christ the Man of Sorrows as Mediator*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 33 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 63 × 43 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 432
- 16.8 Hieronymus Wierix, *Christ the Good Shepherd and Man of Sorrows*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 60 verso. Engraving (bound-in), 83 × 60 mm. Pendant to Fig. 9. Print Collection, New York Public Library 435
- 16.9 Hieronymus Wierix, *Virgin of Sorrows*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 61 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 82 × 62 mm. Pendant to Fig. 8. Print Collection, New York Public Library 436
- 16.10 Hieronymus Wierix, *Christ the Good Shepherd and Man of Sorrows*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 70 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 83 × 60 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 438
- 16.11 Thomas de Leu, *The Cistercian Congregation of Pelplin Kneeling before the Virgin and Child, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica*, 1600, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 27 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 78 × 53 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 442
- 16.12 Hieronymus Wierix, *Annunciation*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 52 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 101 × 70 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 445
- 16.13 Anonymous, *The Boy Jesus Reading while the Virgin Sews*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 53 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 77 × 45 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 447
- 16.14 Hieronymus Wierix, *Penitent Magdalene*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 56 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 84 × 62 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library 449
- 17.1 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Holy Trinity* (1615–1620). Oil on canvas, 158 cm × 152 cm. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten 463
- 17.2 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga and his Family Adoring the Holy Trinity* (1604–1605). Oil on canvas, 381 cm × 477 cm. Mantua, Palazzo ducale 465
- 17.3 Austrian, *The Trinity with Christ Crucified* (ca. 1410). Egg tempera on silver fir, 118.1 × 114.9 cm. London, The National Gallery 467

- 17.4 Albrecht Dürer, *The Holy Trinity* (1511). Woodcut on paper, 39.4 × 28.1 cm 469
- 17.5 Jacob Matham after Martin van Heemskerck, *The Trinity* (1602). Engraving, 29.7 × 22 cm 470
- 17.6 Baccio Bandinelli, *Dead Christ Supported by Nicodemus* (ca. 1555). Florence, Santissima Annunziata 471
- 17.7 Pieter Paul Rubens, *The Wedding by Proxy of Marie de' Medici to King Henry IV* (1622–1624). Oil on canvas, 394 × 295 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre 472
- 17.8 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1611). Oil on canvas, 404.5 × 296.5 cm. Antwerp, Sint-Pauluskerk 475
- 17.9 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Epitaph of Jan Michielsens and his Wife Maria Maes* (1618). Oil on wood, 138 × 178 cm. Antwerp, Museum voor Schone Kunsten 476
- 17.10 Andrea Mantegna, *Dead Christ* (ca. 1490). Tempera on canvas, 68 × 81 cm. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera 478
- 17.11 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Christ on the Cross* (1612). Oil on wood, 145.3 × 91.8 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek 479
- 18.1 Chapter-Heading, “Gloriosa Virgem Sancta Catherina no Martyrio no Yodai. Core Simeon Metaphrastes to yv fito no qirocvni miyetari. Novemb. 25”, in *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* (Cazzusa, Jesuit College: 1591). The Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, Shelfmark: Arch. B.f.69, v.2, p. 61 494
- 18.2 Chapter-Heading, “*Vida de Sancta Chaterina Virgem e Martyr*”, in *Vidas gloriosas de algũs Sanctos e Sanctas*. Vatican Apostolic Library, *Reginenses Latini* 459, fol. 276 496

Introduction

Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel

In Jerónimo Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*, a series of 153 Gospel images accompanied by extensive textual annotations and meditations, the author explains the parable of the sower by reference to the incarnation of Christ. He describes the parable's visual force and universal meaning, putting forward the mystery of the Incarnation as the grounds for the parabolic image. He points out, first of all, that the parable of the sower, alone amongst all parables, begins with the injunction to behold: 'But why is it that Ecce is annexed to this parable and no other, just as if to a great and novel thing worthy of admiration?'¹ The answer lies in the principle of parable-formation, that this parable envisages as consonant with the principle of *manifestatio*, the bringing forth of the Word, expressed visibly in the person of Christ. Nadal bases his argument on Christ's use of the verb *exiit*—'went forth'—in the parable's opening line, 'Behold the sower went forth to sow'. The parable of the sower is universal, encompassing all the mysteries figured in the parables of Christ, because it describes Christ the sower going forth in two senses: the eternal generation of the Word, the Son of God, who came forth at the dawn of the days of eternity, and the incarnation of the Word, the Son of Man, who came forth into the world, having been made man in the womb of the Virgin and thence been born as the foremost fruit of the lineage of men. Since the Incarnation is the work of all the Trinity, reasons Nadal, the Word of God was sowing himself in and through this great mystery, which is to say that the parable of the sower, to the extent that it portrays Christ, concerns the self-sowing of the Word. As such, it encapsulates in brief the coming forth of all other mysteries, of all Gospel fruit, and hence, of all parables. Nadal is claiming that the parable of

1 Nadal Jerónimo, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia quae in sacrosancto Missae sacrificio toto anno leguntur: Cum eorundem Evangeliorum concordantia. Editio ultima. In qua Sacer Textus ad emendationem Bibliorum Sixti v. et Clementis VIII. Restitutus*. (Antwerp, Ex Officina Plantiniana, apud Ioannem Moretum: 1607) 69: 'Sed quid est, quod ad hanc, & ad aliam nullam parabolam adiungitur Ecce; quasi ad rem magnam, novam, & admiratione dignam?' On the image theory implicit in Nadal's readings of this and other parables, see Melion W.S., "Parabolic Analogy and Spiritual Discernment in Jerónimo Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* of 1595", in Stelling L. – Hendrix H. – Richardson T.M. (eds.), *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 23 (Leiden – Boston: 2012) 299–338.

the sower represents the power of self-representation at the heart of all mysteries, Gospels, and parables by which God communicates his discernible presence to humankind. The vocative 'Ecce' is used to indicate that the call to see what this parable bodies forth, in fact applies to all parables: 'Wherefore the *Ecce*, since it belongs to this most excellent parable, from thence appertains to all parables. In other respects, the principle that brings forth the Word of God, affirming its divine manifestation ('manifestationem') in the splendour of sanctity and infinite light of divinity, stands forth visibly in every created word of God and divinely revealed doctrine, so that the divine virtue made visible in that priniple may be put forward for the salvation of souls'.²

As Nadal contends, the generation ('productio') of the Word asserts the principle of making visible ('manifestatio') that likewise expresses itself in every word begotten of God and divinely brought to light. On this account, the productive principle ('ratio productionis') that makes divine virtue perceptible in Christ also makes it discernible in his every word, not least the parables. Parables originate in this logic of divine manifestation, for they consist of words that visibly figure the nature of Christ. Chief amongst the parables, of course, is the parable of the sower: by showing Christ the sower going forth to sow the Word, it signifies—indeed makes visible—the principle of divine generation that binds the production of the Word and the production of parabolic exempla. Or, put differently, it consists of images that portray the very possibility of promulgating the Word by visible means. This process of parable formation, part and parcel of the larger incarnational process of *manifestatio* that represents divine virtue to human sense, provides the basis for Nadal's image theory of the parable, which is implicitly also an affirmation of incarnation doctrine.

Nadal is one particularly rich instantiation of the complex interplay of Incarnation—as both doctrine and mystery—and image, as both conceptualized and produced, we had in mind when we organized the conference which produced this volume. The doctrine of the Incarnation, most Western Christians agreed, had been articulated succinctly and authoritatively at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 CE:

2 Ibidem: 'Quare illud *Ecce*, ad hanc cum attineat excellentissimam, ex eo ad omnes parabolas pertinet. Ceterum, ut ex ratione productionis Verbi Dei, quae manifestationem dicit in splendoribus sanctitatis, & infinita luce divinitatis in Deo; ita in omni verbo Dei creato, & divinitus revelata doctrina, illa extat ratio, ut divina virtus in ea manifestetur & exeratur ad animorum salutem'.

We believe in one God the Father all-powerful, Maker of all things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth; for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.³

If the Council articulated a formulation of the relationship between Father and Son that proved both durable and authoritative, that formulation set in motion other, equally potent questions, among them, the relationship between Christ and images, which themselves were beginning to be made across the Christian Mediterranean, between matter and divinity, and the role of the senses in apprehending divinity.

In the eighth century, in his first apology for images, John of Damascus articulated both the aporia of the Incarnation and what, in the West, became the Incarnation's authorization for image-making:

Fleshly nature was not lost when it became part of the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also the Flesh became the Word, yet remained flesh, being united to the person of the Word. Therefore, I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood.⁴

As John argued so eloquently, in choosing Incarnation, God chose not simply to be visible, but to alter the relationship between divinity and 'flesh', between the Creator and creation, between God and the human body. 'The Son', John wrote, 'is the living, essential, and precisely similar Image of the invisible God'—the Incarnation, according to John, is the originating archetype of image-making. In the West, John's particular conceptualization became authoritative; Thomas Aquinas, among others, rested his own theorization of images upon it. So, too,

3 Pelikan J. – Hotchkiss V. (eds.), *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *Early, Eastern, & Medieval* (New Haven: 2003) 159. See also Pelikan J., *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: 1971).

4 John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. D. Anderson (Crestwood, NY: 1980) 16.

in Western Europe, in a world in which literacy was the purview of a tiny minority, as Pope Gregory I wrote to Bishop Serenus, 'those who do not know letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they are unable to read in books'.⁵

John of Damascus, and following him, Aquinas, built their arguments for images by invoking the Incarnation; both also knew that 'the Word become flesh' was no fixed concept, self-evident and determined, but singularly generative, engendering debates beginning in the first century after Christ and historically elusive of efforts, such as the Council of Nicaea, at definition. By the time Aquinas took up the Damascene's arguments, moreover, another field of inquiry was also addressing the puzzle of the Incarnation in terms of divinity, human body, and matter. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council had decreed:

There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us.⁶

That brief statement, formulated in direct response to Berengar of Tours' eleventh-century challenge to the emerging doctrine on the nature of Christ's presence in the central act of collective worship, sparked three centuries of close, subtle, and heterogeneous discussion.⁷ It sparked as well the struggle to reconcile Christ's 'real presence' with questions of visibility and visuality. New kinds of images emerged in its wake, perhaps foremost, those of the Mass of Pope Gregory, but also, the Godly Mill, which themselves materialized in color and line ways of thinking about Incarnation, specifically in reference to

5 The translation is Celia Chazelle's, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles", *Word & Image* 6 (1990) 139.

6 See Tanner N.P., S.J. (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (London: 1990) I 230: 'Una vero est fidelium universalis ecclesia, extra quam nullus omnino salvatur, in qua idem ipse sacerdos et sacrificium Iesus Christus, cuius corpus et sanguis in sacramento altaris sub speciebus panis et vini veraciter continentur, transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et vino in sanguinem postestate divina, ut ad perficiendum mysterium unitatis accipiamus ipsi de suo, quod accepit ipse de nostro'.

7 Levy I.C. – Macy G. – Ausdall K. van (eds.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: 2012).

the question of presence on the altar, a question of growing intensity in late medieval piety.⁸

Between Nicaea and the Fifth Lateran Council, 'Incarnation' as aporia more than doctrine engendered images, texts, music, objects, scents—forms to engage all the senses, becoming at once the focus and the wellspring for a world that, now in hindsight, we know to have been singularly generative. By 1500, the human body had become implicated in Christian worship at so many levels—as recipient, certainly, but also as performer, in mimesis of Christ's actions and gestures, itself the medium of acts, sounds, gestures, as well as the maker of instruments, liturgical objects and vestments, altarpieces and candlesticks, crucifixes and monstrances. By 1500, Christian Europe was thick with visual, aural, haptic engagements with Incarnation, each one of which materialized dimensions and in materializing, brought attributes, resonances, associations, allusions—and deepened the mystery.

As early as 1437, the Tuscan painter Cennino Cennini, in his *Libro dell'arte*, codified usage of the Incarnation as a meta-pictorial metaphor for drawing and painting, medial processes that transform unseen things ('cose non vedute, cacciandosi sotto ombra di naturali') into things seen discernibly to exist ('dando a dimonstrare quello che non è, sia').⁹ The draftsman and the painter, so argued Cennini, transform spirit into matter, converting mental images housed in the imaginative faculty ('fantasia') into mimetic images fashioned by the master's skilled hand ('operazione di mano').¹⁰ Cennini was responding to a poetic tradition, amongst whose chief exponents were Brunetto Latini, Chiaro Davanzati, and Francesco Petrarca, that drew parallels between poetic invention, construed as a kind of verbal painting, and the mystery of

8 On the Mass of Pope Gregory, see Gormans A. – Lenters T. (eds.), *Das Bild der Erscheinung. Die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter* (Berlin: 2007); Meier E., *Die Gregorsmesse. Funktionen eines spätmittelalterlichen Bildtypus* (Cologne: 2006); and Bynum C.W., "Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century", in Hamburger J.F. – Bouché A.-M. (eds.), *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 2006) 208–240. On the Godly Mill, see Krueger I., "Das Ulmer Hostienmühlenretabel im Zusammenhang der erhaltenen Hostienmühlendarstellungen", *Ulm und Oberschwaben* 42/43 (1978) 60–84; Lindet L., "Les représentations allégoriques du moulin et du pressoir dans l'art Chrétien", *Revue Archéologique* (1900) 403–413; and Rye-Clausen H., *Die Hostienmühlenbilder im Lichte mittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit* (Stein am Rhein: 1981).

9 Cennini Cennino, *Il libro dell'arte, o Trattato della pittura*, ed. C. Milanesi (Florence: 1859) 2. On Cennini's incarnational discourse of art, see Kruse C., "Fleisch werden—Fleisch malen. Malerei als 'incarnazion'. Mediale Verfahren des Bildwerdens im *Libro dell'arte* von Cennino Cennini", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 63 (2000) 305–326.

10 Cennini, *Libro dell'arte*, ed. Milanesi, 2.

the Incarnation. Implicit in this paragone is the notion that the poet fashions words from flesh, not flesh from words, whereas the painter represents bodily what poetic metaphors may only convey by virtual means. Based in the analogy of image and incarnation, Cennini's conceits continued to circulate, in one form or another, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

In the Christian tradition, this potent analogy attaches to Augustine's conception of the spiritual image, as codified in Book 12 of *De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*).¹¹ Composed as an appendix to his great treatise on the first three chapters of Genesis and their historical, as opposed to allegorical or figurative, meaning, Book 12 concerns the interpretation of Paradise, or the third heaven, described by Paul in 2 *Corinthians* 12:2–4. How does this Paradise, Augustine invites the reader to ask, relate to the Paradise of Genesis, and further, how does the knowledge of Creation and of the Creator, available to Adam and Eve before the Fall, relate to the knowledge of heaven and earth and of God available to us? What sorts of knowing can the natural body exercise, and how is the knowledge thus produced to be differentiated from the episteme of the spirit (*spiritus*) and the *noesis* of the intellect (*intelligentia*)? The answers to these questions form part of a larger philosophical and theological project pursued jointly in *De Genesi* and *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*): Augustine attempts to explain how the incorporeal soul actively participates in the life of the material body, and he analogizes to this essential continuity of body and soul, the connection between human being and Godhead. This connection is ultimately licensed by the mystery of the Incarnation.

In Augustine's mature theory of sensation, the concept of *spiritus* serves to designate the part of the soul that mediates between its sensitive and intellectual parts, and thus, between body and soul on the one hand, soul and divinity on the other. Augustine relies upon vision (and to some extent hearing) to clarify the nature of these parts and their mediating functions: sensory objects impress themselves upon the senses, giving rise to sense impressions that then rely upon the *spiritus* to provoke the faculty of sensation. The *spiritus* transmutes these impressions into visual images, picturing them so that the soul may know and ultimately judge and interpret what the body has seen.

11 On Augustine's conception of *spiritus* and spiritual image-making, see Miles M.R., "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*", *The Journal of Religion* 63 (1983) 125–142; and Melion W.S., "In sensus cadentem imaginem: Varieties of the Spiritual Image in Theodoor Galle's *Life of the Blessed Father Ignatius of Loyola* of 1610", in Boer W. de – Göttler C. (eds.), *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* 26 (Leiden – Boston: 2013) 63–107, esp. 97–105.

Sensation proper results from this creative act of the soul: the *spiritus* provides the *imago* (image) that alone is susceptible to the soul's higher faculties of knowing and remembering. Under normal conditions, the three kinds of vision—corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual—are interlinked hierarchically: without spiritual vision, the corporeal vision of external objects would be imperceptible, for sensation derives from the activity of the *spiritus*, and without intellectual vision, the spiritual vision of likenesses would be fruitless, for these images could be known and remembered, but neither evaluated nor interpreted.

Augustine's image theory, like that of Cennini, clearly derives from the theology of the Incarnation, and a strong case can be made for the theological basis of aesthetic doctrine, as applied both to sacred and to secular image-making, throughout the early modern period. Conversely, image theory is brought to bear in texts and images on the Incarnation, as an heuristic and hermeneutic device that aids in the difficult task of assessing how and why the Word was made flesh in Christ the image of God. In their homiletic and exegetical texts, for example, the great reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Menno Simons, along with Jesuit theologians such as Petrus Canisius, constantly make use of visual, indeed pictorial, analogies to reflect upon the nature of Christ and unfold the Old Testament prophecies, themselves highly visual, that prefigure his coming. The incarnational link between theology and image-theory, precisely because it seems so ubiquitous and informs so much art, art theory, and religious writing—catechetical, meditative, and dogmatic—has been taken for granted but little studied by historians of art, literature, and religion, and nor has it received sufficient attention from theologians and cultural historians.

This book consists of five subsections that point up various inflections of the relation between image-making and incarnation doctrine. Section 1, "Representing the Mystery of the Incarnation", comprises four essays that pose a crucial question about the representability of this fundamental mystery: how were the divine essence and material substance, the spirit and flesh of Christ to be portrayed as co-present and indivisible? Herbert Kessler demonstrates that one way of answering this question involved formulating a new iconography for Christ or, better, a new mode of picturing him—the so-called *Majestas Domini* dating from the ninth century, as exemplified in the First Bible of Charles the Bold. Although his essay (like that of Mark Jordan) deals with medieval rather than early modern material, the issues it explores, especially the incarnational significance of mimetic images juxtaposed to geometrical diagrams, resonate so fully with other essays in the volume (Geert Warnar's, Agnès Guiderdoni's, and Dalia Judovitz's, for example) that it seemed

appropriate to utilize it as a prolegomenon to what follows. The Touronian and Carolingian versions of the *Majestas Domini*, as Kessler shows, body forth the theological argument that Christ the incarnate Word fulfills, in a typological sense, the promise of salvation implicit in the image of God the Creator of all things, who appears elsewhere in such manuscripts. Positioned at the 'mid-point' of the universe, Christ is identified as the *medietas* ('mediating center') where the circular zones of heaven and of earth meet, their circumferences coalescing at his *umbilicus* ('umbilical cord', i.e., navel). His medial position, midway between heaven and earth, between mimesis and abstraction, functions as analogue to his incarnational status as the Mediator between God and humankind, between spirit and flesh, who grants access to his redemptive presence in and through the sacrament of the Eucharist that he himself instituted.

Klaus Krüger ascertains by reference to the explicitly medial status of Antonello da Messina's *Virgin Annunciate* and Gianlorenzo Bernini *Capella Fonseca*, how the aesthetic effect of the image qua image was seen to mediate between the polarities paradoxically reconciled by the mystery of the Incarnation. The pictorial status of the image stands proxy for the condition of divine manifestation, in which the unimaginable Logos becomes discernible, the infigurable becomes representable, the ineffable, expressible. For Antonello, various kinds and degrees of indeterminacy—the synthesis of *imago* (icon) and *historia* (history), of description (*Zustandsbild*) and narration (*Ereignis*), of felicity and solemnity—combine to represent an event, the Annunciation, that is seen and yet not seen (given the angel Gabriel's absence), in analogy to the great mystery, the Incarnation of the Logos, that transpires in the flesh and yet remains unimaginable. For Bernini, the painting of the Annunciation embedded within sculpted registers of stone and bronze makes an issue of the incarnate Word's newfound visibility, as visualized in the meditative imaginary of Fonseca himself.

Jaime Lara reveals very different intersections of incarnational doctrine and representation when transposed to the Spanish New World. Taking a number of Aztec images, he shows the ways in which missionaries drew on them to make intelligible the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, even as those images brought new connotations to flesh and eating. So, too, at mid-century, indigenous artists and Spanish missionaries began using materials native to Mexico to render 'bicultural and bivisual' images, such as crucifixes in which the body of Christ was composed of corn. Such images translated the doctrine of the Incarnation at many levels, including the host as tortilla.

Matthieu Somon examines the pictorial devices marshaled by Charles Le Brun in his nativity scene, the so-called *Silence*, to evoke the transcendent and ineffable mystery of the Incarnation. Le Brun, as Somon argues, constructs a

complex visual analogy for the Incarnation: just as the newborn child's radiance is paradoxically enhanced by the shadows partially obscuring him, so Christ the incarnate Word combines in himself both divine and human attributes, the former indiscernible, the latter discernible to the human intellect. The Virgin's distinctive gesture, which calls for silence in the face of the mystery, constitutes an acknowledgment, based in the negative theology of Pierre de Bérulle, that speech is inadequate to the task of understanding the conjoined humanity and divinity of Jesus, whose dual nature is best evoked by painting's power to reveal even while concealing what it purports to show.

Section II, "Imago Dei and the Incarnate Word", investigates how the status of Christ as the image of God was seen to license various kinds and degrees of sacred image, both material and spiritual. Mark Jordan sketches a network of terms—'imago', 'convenientia', 'manifestatio'—that Thomas Aquinas used in the *Summa*. Jordan reveals each word's connections to other terms and through those connections the richness of Thomas's thinking on the Incarnation and the sacraments. Jordan takes the reader past Thomas's well-known and traditional argument—that the Incarnation authorized images—to show a theology of manifestation. In so doing, he helps us better to understand Thomas's conceptualization of the relationship between the Incarnation, as historical fact, and the sacraments, as vivid manifestation. In Thomas's 'very compositional structures', Jordan shows, 'both incarnation and image have, at their center, a notion of the manifesting event'.

Niklaus Largier considers how 'the incarnation, the unity of man and God beyond all representation, turns for Henry Suso into the condition of the possibility of a visual poetics that emphasizes the aspect of bare figure'. That bare figure, understood in relation to Suso's teacher Meister Eckhart's apophatic theology, is beyond all hermeneutics and as such, at once overcomes the natural power of images and grounds the soul's assimilation to Christ. Largier explicates Suso's notion of going 'through the images beyond the images', identifying three moments in the function of the image: allegorical, affective and sensual, and conformational. He closes with a meditation on a poetics of disimagination oriented toward the incarnation's unity of god and man.

Lee Palmer Wandel situates John Calvin's *Institutes* in late medieval visual culture, in order to tease out dimensions of Calvin's understanding of the Incarnation as revelation that were silenced by sixteenth-century iconoclasm. She draws on two images to invoke that world and to suggest something of the multiple conceptions of time that retables imaged forth in their representations of the Incarnation. In them, revelation was not a single event, the Incarnation was not an historical moment. As in the medieval liturgy, revelation and Incarnation are neither narrative nor eternally present. Against these two images, Calvin's particular formulation of the visibility of God, the visibility of

revelation—not only in the person of Christ but also in all Creation—acquires greater precision. So, too, these two images make clearer Calvin's particular understanding of the sign: not a convention that can be 'read', but a mystery inviting consideration.

Geert Warnar offers a close analysis of Jan Provoost's enigmatic *Sacred Allegory*, proposing that it purports to represent the mystical experience of *visio Dei* which allows the votary to see God, even in this life. Such vision, as distilled by Provoost, is purely reflexive, for it elides any distinction between seeing God and being seen by him. The intercessory presence of Christ the incarnate Word enables this contemplative relation between divine vision and the 'one-fold eye' that the painting attempts both to describe and diagram. Provoost's incarnational imagery, as Warnar makes evident, closely parallels the distinctive visual tropes employed by Jan van Ruusbroec in his *Spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit*.

Christopher Wild brings to light the incarnational logic that underlies pre-Enlightenment emblematic theory and practice in Germany. The Pauline metaphors of grafting implicit in the term *emblema* contributed to the notion that the emblematic *pictura* is a bodying forth of the 'living spirit' encoded in the emblem's textual components. Like the Aristotelian relation between matter and form, the emblem's picture and texts were conceived as mutually generative, on the model of the mutual ingrafting of humanity and divinity made possible by the mystery of the Incarnation. Moreover, as Wild reveals, the *pictura* was construed as emergent, not fixed, and its point of origin comparable to dynamic rhetorical processes, such as *enargeia*, *energeia*, and *evidentia*, which produce unmediated visual effects.

Section III, "Literary Figurations of the Incarnation", investigates the verbal production of images having to do with the divine and human nature of Christ. Agnès Guiderdoni offers a reading of Pierre de Bérulle's *Discours de l'état et des grandeurs de Jésus* (1623), preliminary to a longer study she is pursuing. In particular, she attends here to his consideration of painting as it was informed by and itself offered a metaphor for the Incarnation. Bérulle distinguished between human painters, whose efforts would always fail, and Christ, between efforts to render that which was seen and the divine painting of the soul, which was itself at once a negative gesture—the erasure of sin—and the true representation of Christ in the soul. She also shows us how Bérulle's discussion of painting implicitly accords printing a more positive value.

Bart Ramakers discusses a remarkable group of *comparaties* ('dramatized comparisons') by the Flemish *rederijker* Cornelis Everaert, focusing in particular on the play comparing the Virgin Mary's spiritual qualities to the natural properties of light. As the play progresses, the central character of this

performative analogical exercise, *Ymagineirlic Gheest* ('Imaginative Mind'), comes more fully to realize Mary's plenipotency, learning how to envision her as Mediatrix, first experimentally, then exegetically. Her intercessory efficacy, argues Everaert, derives from her crucial participation in the mystery of the Incarnation, true source of the light that now illuminates the world. The fact that Imaginative Mind was born blind, serves to emphasize that spiritual vision must be brought to bear, if the Marian votary wishes truly to appreciate the Virgin's luminous virtue.

Michael Randall considers the central role of interpretation in Jean Molinet's *Roman de la rose moralisé*. He teases out Molinet's understanding of interpretation—and the essential dependency of correct interpretation on the Incarnation—through a juxtaposition of Molinet's text and the fifteenth-century painting, attributed to the Van Eyck workshop, which scholars have named *The Fountain of Life*. Each in its own medium takes up the implications of the incarnate Word for reading the world and its languages, symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical. Each articulates its conceptualization of interpretation through the construction of an opposition between Ecclesia and Synagoga, between those who are formed and informed by the doctrine of the Incarnation and those who are not. Text and image both participate in a late medieval incarnational hermeneutic.

Section IV, "Transformative Analogies of Matter and Spirit", delves into some of the ways that material properties and processes, in their effects on the beholder, were analogized to the incarnational merging of matter and spirit, humanity and divinity, hypostatized by Christ. Ralph Dekoninck calls attention to the 'incarnational dynamic' at play in Caravaggio's *Madonna dei pellegrini*: just as the Word, in becoming flesh, made the divine humanly present, so Caravaggio, by painting at the threshold between art and nature, the sacred and the profane, corporeal and imaginative vision, produces an emergent effect of presence that seems more to incarnate the Virgin and Child than merely representing them. The larger context for this liminal effect was the cult of Loreto, centered on the house where Mary once lived in Nazareth. The Santa Casa was revered as a tangible relic or, better, reliquary of the great mystery that transpired within it, and consequently, it also functioned as a 'metonymic allegory' of Mary, who sheltered in this place while sheltering the incarnate Word within her body.

Reindert Falkenburg enumerates the many representational ambiguities in Hieronymus Bosch's *Mass of St. Gregory* from the Prado *Epiphany Triptych*, showing how they serve to adduce the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, cumulatively dissolving the distinction between *signum* and *res*. The projective motion orchestrated by Bosch—from background to foreground, from artifice

to *praesentia realis*, from ‘altarpiece in an altarpiece’ to living apparition—stages the incarnational ‘entanglement’ of divinity and humanity made manifest in the person of Christ. Falkenburg argues that the relation between the Crucifixion scene that actually seems to take place above the altar and the Man of Sorrows standing before St. Gregory should be seen as typological, in that Christ fulfills the past historical event by actively intervening in the sacrifice of the Mass, thus entering the world of the beholder.

Dalia Judovitz interprets the complex interaction of light and shadow in two nocturnes by Georges de La Tour—the *Newborn Child* and *Adoration of the Shepherds*—as figurations of the Incarnation. In both paintings, effects of occultation and adumbration, combined with the conspicuous absence of sacred attributes, emphasize that the Incarnation entailed the fundamental concealment of Jesus’s divinity by his human flesh and material circumstances. La Tour therefore represents this ‘mystery of mysteries’ by circumventing it: he fashions a meta-discourse on painting’s spiritual limitations, and, paradoxically, thereby challenges the beholder spiritually to discern the transcendent mystery that exceeds the scope of the painter’s mimetic art.

Walter Melion takes up the manuscript prayerbook composed circa 1610 by Martin Borschman, subprior of the Cistercian monastery in Gdańsk Pomerania, which contains 221 engravings, 115 by the Wierix brothers of Antwerp. The engravings, pasted or bound into the book, together with the accompanying prayers, invite meditation on the Incarnation by dissolving the page into the person; various material and medial processes—printing, pasting, cutting, and binding—function as templates for the relationship of the votary and Christ. The jointly visual and verbal apparatus also encourages the votary to meditate on the form, function, and meaning of paper, its transformation from soiled fabric to blank surface, its particular texture, weight, and density, and its potential as metaphor for spiritual forming and printing. The exercitant is urged to consider correspondences—between paper and person, between artisan and monk—that themselves reinscribe the order’s emphasis on the bodily and manual expression of humility, its particular mode of enacting the Incarnation.

Section v, “Visualizing the Flesh of Christ”, considers the relation between the Incarnation and the Passion, asking how the mystery of Christ’s birth was viewed through the lens of his impending sacrifice. Colette Nativel expounds the incarnational argument of Rubens’s Trinitarian epitaph, painted for Judoca van der Capelle in memory of her recently deceased husband. The iconography, as she indicates, diverges from a traditional Throne of Mercy: not only does the painfully disfigured and foreshortened body of Christ project emphatically into the space of the viewer, but, even more surprisingly, God

the Father, in his embrace of the Son, takes the form of a Pietà. This Marian allusion underscores the functional connection between the mysteries of the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, who was born of the Virgin at the behest of the Trinity, in order that humankind might finally be redeemed through his self-oblation. Rubens, as Nativel further reveals, was responding to the Marian theology of the Discalced Carmelites, as well as to the veristic Christology discernible in meditative texts by Alfonso Paleotti, Hugo Grotius, Carolus Scribanus, Sidronius Hosschius, and others.

Haruko Ward analyzes the stories of St. Catherine of Alexandria as they were redacted in Kirishitanban ('Christian edition'), books published by Jesuit presses in Japan, for their representation of the Incarnation. She deploys multiple lenses to read the stories: the Jesuit tradition of the *Spiritual Exercises* and their particular practices of visualization and imagination; the complex problems of translation from Christian Europe to Buddhist Japan; gender theories as they illumine the Kirishitanban's elision of the distinction between Catherine's speech and acts and Christ's, particularly Catherine's martyrdom and the Passion. Ward shows that the practice of reading these stories exercised the imagination of the votary, inviting a chain of incarnation from Christ, through Catherine, to the votary and her community.

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PART 1

Representing the Mystery of the Incarnation



Medietas / Mediator and the Geometry of Incarnation

Herbert L. Kessler

Fifty years ago, Meyer Schapiro published an article focused on a fragmentary relief sculpture from the base of an altar in the cathedral of Rodez [Figs. 1.1 and 1.2].¹ His principal interest was stylistic and historical, leading him to date the relief to the mid-eleventh century, much earlier than its Romanesque counterparts; but Schapiro's rich analysis also included, among many other observations, the tracing of the sculpture's iconographic origins to manuscript illumination from Carolingian Tours, the primary comparison being the *Majestas Domini* in the First Bible of Charles the Bald produced at the monastery of St. Martin (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 329^v) [Fig. 1.3].² Both the relief and the miniature feature the Incarnate God (with notably small heads and legs) seated on an orb and holding a closed book in his left hand and a small disk in his right. In the one, Christ's upper torso is encircled by a great ring equal in size to the orb on which the Savior sits and, like it, originally enlivened with glass paste insets, gold, and silver; a band engraved with a large A and Ω runs along the middle; and remains at the upper left and at top and bottom right suggest that originally the entire field was enclosed by a rhomboid frame. In the other, the two rings intersect to form a figure-eight mandorla, and the angles of the framing rhombus terminate in partial circles containing bust portraits of the major prophets. Below each prophet portrait, one of the four beasts that Ezekiel and then John the Evangelist saw in their visions of God

- 1 Schapiro M., "A Relief in Rodez and the Beginnings of Romanesque Sculpture in Southern France", in Meiss M. et al. (eds.), *Studies in Western Art: Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art. Vol. 1: Romanesque and Gothic Art: Selected Papers* (Princeton: 1963) 40–66 [repr. in Schapiro M., *Romanesque Art* (New York: 1977) 285–305]. Since then: *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale, Vol. 1X: Aveyron, Lot, Tarn*, Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, Université de Poitiers (Poitiers: 1984) 72–73; and Gaborit J.-R., "Relief: le Christ en gloire", in *La France romane au temps des premiers Capétiens* (987–1152) [exh. cat., Musée du Louvre] (Paris: 2005) 244–45, cat. no. 183.
- 2 Koehler W. et al., *Die karolingischen Miniaturen, Band 1, 1* (Berlin – Wiesbaden: 1933–2013) 250–256; Kessler H.L., *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours* (Princeton: 1977); and Dutton P.E. – Kessler H.L., *The Poetry and Paintings of the First Bible of Charles the Bald* (Ann Arbor: 1997).



FIGURE 1.1 Christ Raising the Host (*nth century*). Stone bas-relief. Rodez, Musée Fenaille.
IMAGE © BRIDGEMAN IMAGES.

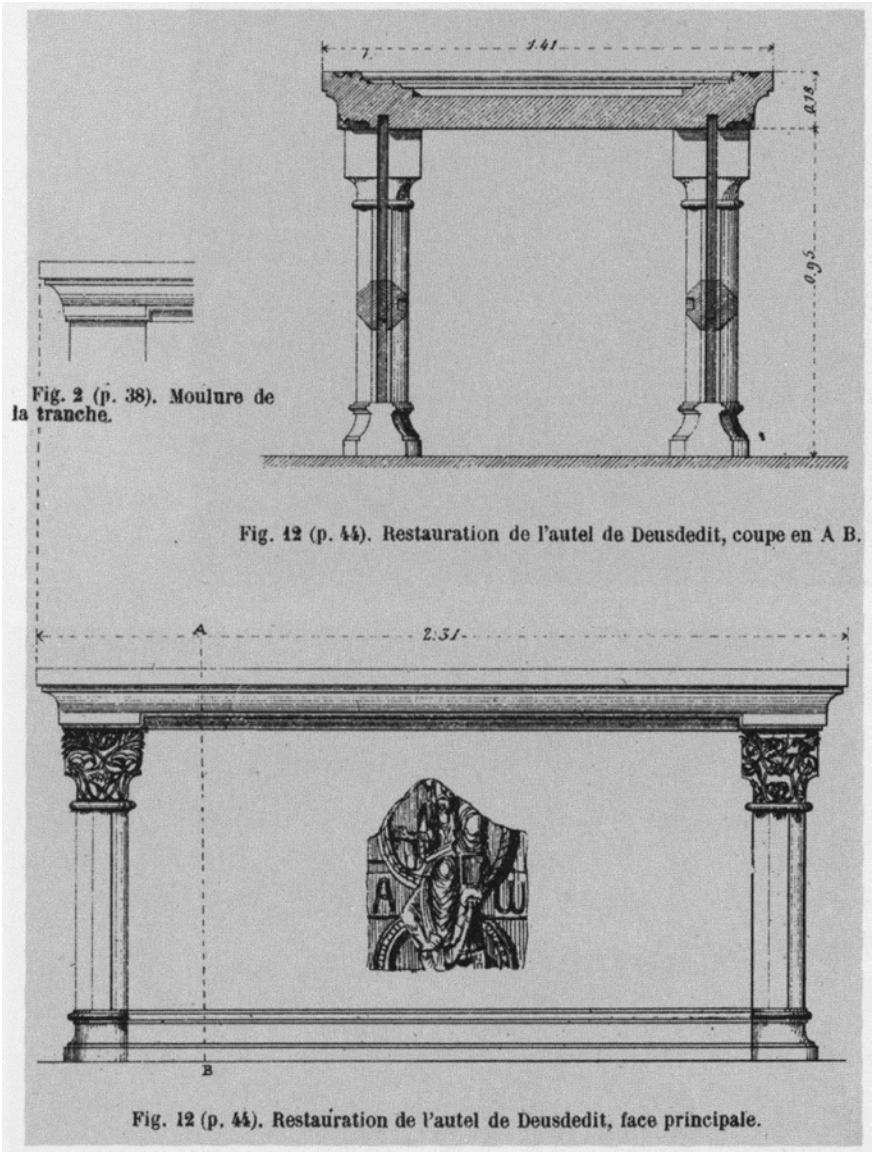


FIGURE 1.2 Altar. Rodez, cathédrale (reconstruction by Bousquet).



FIGURE 1.3 Majestas Domini (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 329^v.

and which came to symbolize the authors of the Gospels is portrayed; their full-length archetypes are shown seated in the page's four corners. Although this paper returns to the Rodez relief in due course, its primary focus is on the Carolingian illumination's underlying geometry and the notions of Incarnation that the geometry inflects in it.³

Bible, Image, Incarnation

A masterpiece of Carolingian art, the *Majestas Domini* in the First Bible of Charles the Bald serves as the Gospels' frontispiece in an enormous single-volume Bible that the monks of St. Martin's presented to the king on Christmas Day 845 as part of a strategy to get the new 'lay abbot' to renew the privileges of immunity, that is, to continue the monastery's exemption from taxes owed the realm.⁴ At the fulcrum of Old and New Testaments in the monumental pandect, the complicated painting condenses all of Scripture into a single image, enlarging and elaborating the tiny bust-length portrait of Christ holding a cosmological disk and book inserted within a circle into the stem of the initial *I* of *In principio creavit deus caelum et terram* at the volume's beginning (fol. 10^v) [Fig. 1.4].⁵ According to the dedicatory poem, the historiated initial would contain within it the Trinitarian mystery: 'In the beginning there was the creator of heaven, and earth, and sea, and the one born of that one, and the Holy Spirit'.⁶ Even more important, facing the depiction of the Fall of Adam

3 See Koehler, *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 2, 240–45; Kessler, *Bibles* 36–58; Kaspersen S., "Majestas Domini—Regnum et Sacerdotium: Zu Entstehung und Leben des Motivs bis zum Investiturstreit", *Hafnia: Copenhagen Papers in the History of Art* 8 (1981) 83–146; Büchsel M., *Die Entstehung des Christusporträts. Bildarchäologie statt Bildhypnose* (Mainz: 2003) 146–149; and Poilpré A.-O., *Maestas Domini. Une image de l'Église en Occident v^e–IX^e siècle* (Paris: 2005).

4 On the gift's dating and circumstances, see Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Painting* 21–44.

5 Kessler H.L., "De una essentia innectuntur sibi duo circuli: Dynamic Signs and Trinitarian Designs", in Bedos-Rezak B. – Hamburger J. (eds.), *Dynamic Signs and Spiritual Designs* (Washington, D.C.: 2015). In addition to the 'author portrait' showing Jerome translating the vulgate (fol. 3^v), the First Bible includes an enormous zodiac before Scripture proper (fol. 8^r), which forms the letter D of Jerome's letter to Paulinus; occupied by personifications of Sol crossing pisces, and Luna, the cosmological diagram suggests temporality before the world's creation.

6 Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Paintings* 110–111: 'In primis caeli terraeque marisque creator/ Ipsius et natus, spiritus atque agius'.

Eve on the opposite page (fol. 11^r),⁷ it would have reminded the reader, in the first instance King Charles himself, that Christ pre-existed the world and that, because of the primogenitors' sin, had himself become a man to mediate on humankind's behalf. From the very beginning of the book, in other words, the pictures follow an agenda for understanding the totality of Scripture as the story of the Incarnation, introduced in the poem: 'The earlier of the testaments is a shadow, the later one its reason. Thus, the journey is double, but the achievement of both is one.'⁸

The youthful Creator holding an open book in the Genesis initial conforms to the type identified as the 'almighty king and creator of earth and heaven'⁹ in the Weingarten Gospels illuminated some fifteen years earlier (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB II 40; fol. 1^r) [Fig. 1.5],¹⁰ the first surviving Touronian example of a tradition of Gospel illustration in which the cosmic ruler is portrayed full-length, enthroned on a globe while resting his feet on the earth. Christ is set within an oval mandorla filled with a dark blue cloudy sky against a pink ground and holds in his left hand an open codex inscribed 'light' and 'life' in Greek and in his right hand a silver cross-staff. The caption likens the evangelists, represented only by their symbols, to sunlight entering the world at dawn: 'In the morning, the evangelists illuminate the world with heavenly perception';¹¹ and the mixture of white and red, the pink that dominates the page and the manuscript's separate evangelist portraits, is simultaneously a reference to sunrise and a trope of the Incarnation when the Divine entered flesh, as in Alcuin's *De incarnatione Christi et de duabis in eo natus*¹² Hrabanus Maurus' *De laudibus sanctae crucis* of ca. 810.¹³

7 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 2, 118–129; and Kessler, *Illustrated Bibles* 13–35.

8 Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Paintings* 108–109: 'Umbra prior quarum causaque posterior/ Ergo iter est duplex, utriusque effectus in uno'.

9 'Hic mundi caelique sedet rex summus et auctor'.

10 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 2, 237–40.

11 'Aurorant mundu[m] aetherioq[ue] animalia sensu'.

12 'Et rosea coelesti lumine aurora oculis refulgent nostris . . . PL 101, col. 271.

13 'qui et in carnis suae castitate candorem lilii demonstravit, et in sanguine passionis rosae ruborem ostendit; *In honorem sanctae crucis*, Book 1, declaratio xvi; *Rabani Mauri. In Honorem sancti crucis*, ed. Perrin M. CCCM 100, (Turnhout: 1997). See Coatsworth E., "Cloth-making and the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Art", in Owen-Crocker G.R. – Graham T. (eds.), *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives: A Memorial Tribute to C.R. Dodwell* (Manchester: 1998) 8–25; and Kessler H.L., "'Hoc visibile imaginatum figurat illud invisibile verum': Imagining God in Pictures of Christ", in De Nie G. et al. (eds.), *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Papers from "Verbal and Pictorial Representations of the Invisible 400 to 1000" (Utrecht, 11–13 December 2003)* (Turnhout: 2005) 293–328.



FIGURE 1.4

"In principio" initial (845). Manuscript illumination.
Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 9r.



FIGURE 1.5 Majestas Domini (ca. 830). Manuscript illumination. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB II 40; fol. 1v.

Abbreviated and encapsulated in the Genesis initial of the First Bible of Charles the Bald, the Weingarten Gospels' basic imagery persisted in a series of cognate manuscripts produced at Tours until the Vikings overran St. Martin's in 853, among them, the Dufay Gospels in Paris (BnF, MS lat. 9385, fol. 179^v) [Fig. 1.6] of 843–51 and the Lothar Gospels of 849 (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 266, fol. 2^v) [Fig. 1.7].¹⁴ The scheme was later integrated in two pages of the Metz Sacramentary (Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 1141, fols. 5^r and 6^r) [Fig. 1.8], illuminated most likely for Charles the Bald's coronation as emperor in 870.¹⁵ The Touronian imagery became very widespread later. For example, it was a source for the letter O of the Trinity page in the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold (London, BL, Add. MS. 49598, fol. 70^r) [Fig. 1.9], illuminated at Winchester in the late tenth century, which features Christ enthroned on a globe, holding a book and blessing, with his upper body enclosed in a mandorla filled with pink clouds that symbolize his two natures.¹⁶ And it recurs in the eleventh-century drawing from Tours in Auxerre (now on deposit in the Bibliothèque municipale), which was the subject of one of Schapiro's articles on the *Majestas Domini* imagery in the first place [Fig. 1.10].¹⁷

To accommodate the pictorial claim of the Gospel harmony pages to the context of the full Bible and, in so doing, to assert the fundamental belief that Christ was the incarnation of Old Testament prophecy, the frontispiece in the First Bible of Charles the Bald, like its counterpart in the somewhat earlier cognate pandect known as the Moutier-Grandval Bible (London, BL, Add. MS 10546, fol. 352^v),¹⁸ added the depictions of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. And while it, like the preceding works, deploys pink to evoke the Divinity's entry into the world, it also likens Christ—now portrayed as an older, bearded man and called 'rex aetherius' in the caption—to the 'four rivers flowing from a single source' at the center of Paradise that flowed to the edges of

14 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 2, 298–305.

15 Mutherich F., *Sacramentar von Metz MS. Lat. 1141*, *Bibliothèque Nationale Paris* (Graz: 1972); Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 2, 165–74; Büchsel, *Entstehung* 146–149; and Palazzo E., "Le livre corps à l'époque carolingienne et son rôle dans la liturgie et de la messe et sa théologie", *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 15 (2010) 31–63 and *L'invention chrétienne des 5 sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Age* (Paris: 2014) 266–285.

16 See Deshman R., *The Benedictional of Aethelwold* (Princeton: 1995) 92–108 et passim.

17 Schapiro M., "Two Romanesque Drawings in Auxerre and Some Iconographic Problems", in Miner, D. (ed.), *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle Da Costa Greene*, (Princeton: 1954) 331–349 [repr. in Schapiro, *Romanesque Art* 306–327]; Kessler, H.L., "St. John's Word and Images Beyond Time," in Carmassi P. – Winterer, C. (eds.), *Text, Bild und Ritual in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft* (8.–11. Jh) (Florence: 2014) 287–309.

18 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 1, 194–209; Kessler, *Bibles* 36–58; and Schmid A.A., *Die Bibel von Moutier-Grandval* (Bern: 1972) 157–65.



FIGURE 1.6 Majestas Domini (ca. 850). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 9385, fol. 179v.



FIGURE 1.7 Majestas Domini (849). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 266, fol. 2v.

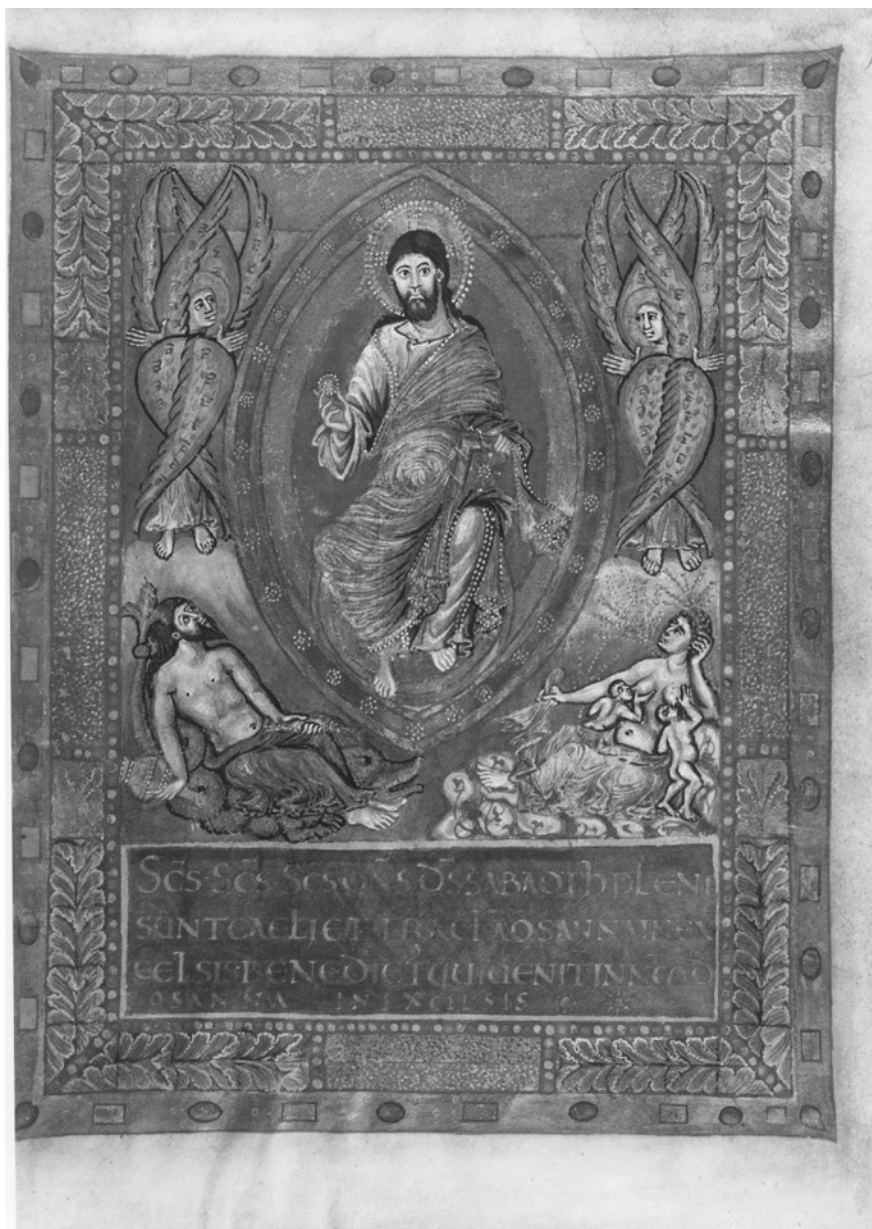


FIGURE 1.8 *Majestas Domini* (ca. 870). *Manuscript illumination*. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 141, fol. 6r.

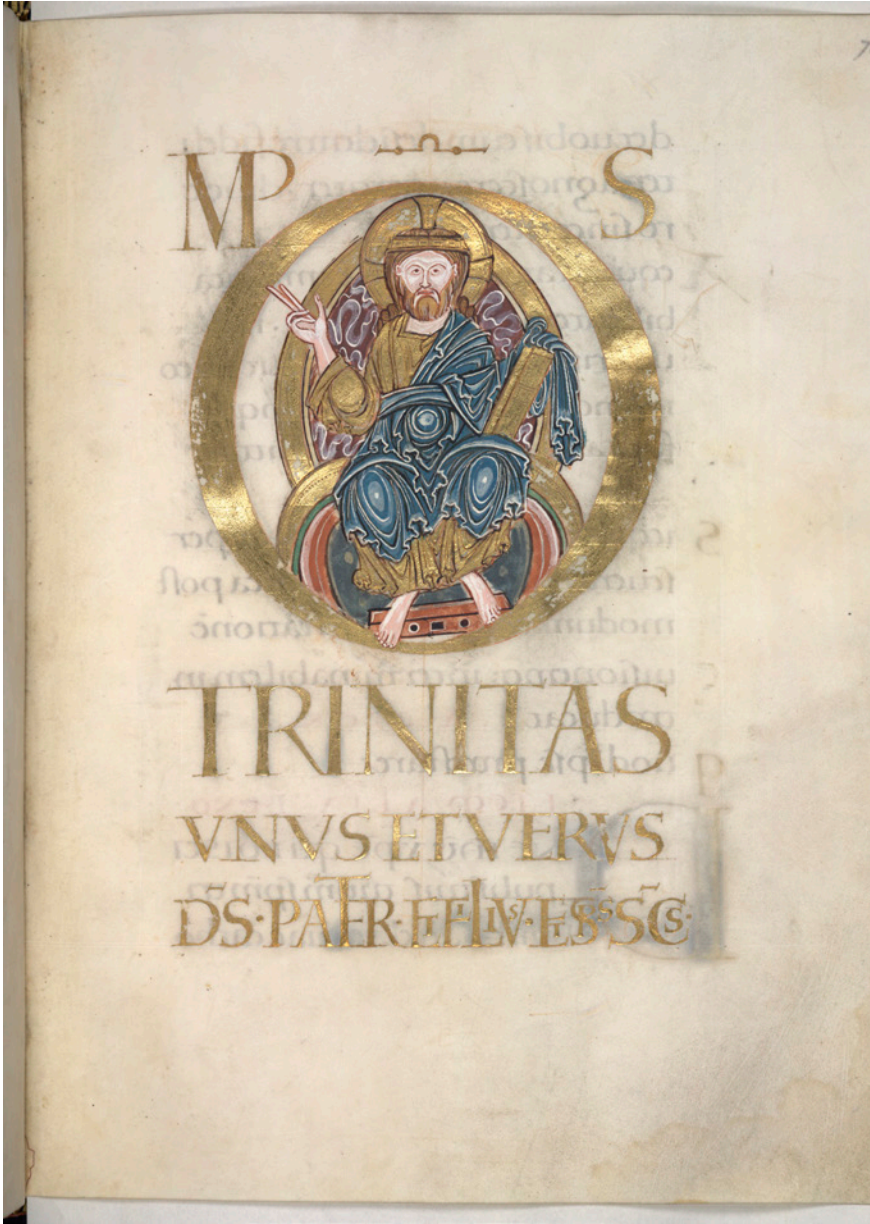


FIGURE 1.9 Trinity. Manuscript illumination. London, BL, Add. MS. 49598, fol. 70r.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD.



FIGURE 1.10 *Majestas Domini. Manuscript illumination. Auxerre, on deposit in the Bibliothèque Municipale.*

the world (*Gen.* 2:10–14); blue bands filled with aquatic birds and plants are introduced beneath each evangelist.¹⁹ A metaphor of Gospel harmony that Jerome evoked in a preface included in the Bible²⁰ and that is reiterated in the dedicatory poem,²¹ the four rivers of Paradise had been featured below depictions of the enthroned Christ in Early Christian apse decorations around the Mediterranean;²² and the same motif was an element of the pictorial program in the earliest Carolingian manuscript, the Godescalc Evangeliary of 781–83 (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1203),²³ made to commemorate Pippin's baptism at the Lateran. There, following pages devoted to each of the four evangelists, Christ is shown within a garden on the recto of a leaf that, on the verso, illustrates the fountain literally. The harmony theme was elaborated by Hrabanus Maurus:

The four Gospels, written by the four evangelists, suggest the four rivers of Paradise, which flow from one source, because just as the rivers originating from one source have watered the entire earth, in the same way, the Gospels flow from the true and unique source, that is Christ; anyone who has drunk from him once will never be thirsty again, the four Gospels coming forth and flowing through the mouths of the preacher, irrigate the whole world to the fruit of virtue.²⁴

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- 19 The caption reads: 'Rex micat aethereus condigne sive prophetae/Hic, euangelicae quattuor atque tubae'; see Dutton-Kessler, *Poetry and Paintings* 116–117.
 - 20 The theme was introduced already in the so-called "Ada Gospels" in Trier (Staatsbibliothek, Cod. 22): 'Hic liber est vitae paradisi et quattuor amnes; clara salutiferi pandens miracula Christi fons'; see Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Vol. 2, 49–55.
 - 21 Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Paintings* 106–107: 'Hic fons, hic doctrina potens, hic flumina opima'.
 - 22 Brenk B., *The Apse, the Image and the Icon: An Historical Perspective of the Apse as a Space for Images* (Wiesbaden: 2010).
 - 23 Brenk B., "Schriftlichkeit und Bildlichkeit in der Hofschule Karls D. Gr.", in *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo* (*Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*) 41 (1994) 631–691; Reudenbach B., *Das Godescalc-Evangeliar. Ein Buch für die Reformpolitik Karls des Grossen* (Frankfurt am Rhein: 1998).
 - 24 'Quattuor ergo Euangelia a quattuor euangelistis conscripta, quattuor flumina paradisi de uno fonte procedentia significant, quia sicut ipsa ex una matrice fontis procedentia totam terram rigauerunt, ita ab uno uero fonte, hoc est, Christo, a quo qui semel bibit, non sitiet in aeternum, quattuor Euangelia emanantia, et per praedicatorum ora diffluentia, totum mundum ad uirtutum fructus germinandum irrigant'; *In Honorem sancti crucis*, ed. cit. 125; and Ferrari M., *Il "Liber sanctae crucis" di Rabano Mauro. Testo—immagine—contesto* (Bern: 1999).

The fountain allegory had been incorporated into the captions of three frontispieces in the St. Gauzelin Gospels in Nancy (Cathedrale, trésor),²⁵ illuminated ca. 830 at St. Martin's brother monastery of Marmoutier, and in the so-called Alcuin Bible (Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Misc. class. Bibl. 1) where, as in the First Bible of Charles the Bald, it is the counterpart of a narrative frontispiece picturing the creation and fall of Adam and Eve.²⁶ The first of the pages in the Nancy manuscript (fol. 1^r) [Fig. 1.11] depicts an enormous book adorned with three crosses elucidated with the titulus: 'This is the book of life, this is the fountain and origin of books. From it flows whatever anyone tastes in the world'.²⁷ The book's shape identifies the Gospels with the altar and its three crosses invite a Trinitarian interpretation;²⁸ and playing with the two meanings of *sapio*, the titulus evokes a similar multiplicity of references by indicating that the wisdom contained in Scripture is also accessible through the Eucharistic wine and bread. The second (fol. 2^v) [Fig. 1.12], alluding to the Edenic fountain in the caption 'Here four flowing from one fountain: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John'²⁹ cracks the book open, replacing the single codex and altar with the chrismon, Christ's name in the form of a cross, the source and origin of the Gospels and of Christian redemption. And the third (fol. 3^v) [Fig. 1.13],³⁰ repeating the second titulus but elaborating the theme in a distinctive way, pictures the *Agnus Dei* crossed by a lance and alongside a chalice,³¹ symbols of the four evangelists and two seraphim, and the four major prophets in the page's

25 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min., Band 1*, 1, 179–186.

26 Ibidem 209–234.

27 'Hic liber est vitae, hic et fons et origo librorum/ Unde fluit quicquid q[ui]sque in orbe sapit'. See Underwood P., "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950) 43–137; Kessler, *Bibles* 45–53; Cotter J., "The Book Within the Book in Medieval Illumination", *Florilegium* 12 (1993) 107–140; and Thunø E., *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome* (Rome: 2004) 57–59.

28 Reynolds R., "Eucharistic Adoration in the Carolingian Era? Exposition of Christ in the Host", *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art & Architecture* 4 (2013) 70–153.

29 'Quattuor hic rutilant uno de fonte fluentes/Matthei Marci Lucae libri atq[ue] Iohann[i]'.
 30 The Nancy manuscript may reflect the picture in the Bamberg Bible (Misc. class. Bibl. 1) also from Marmoutier and datable to 834–43 (fol. 339^v); a pandect containing both the Old and New Testaments, the Bamberg Bible would be a more obvious venue for the prophets' inclusion; see Koehler et al., *Kar. Min., Band 1*, 1, 209–34.

31 The liturgical inflection is confirmed by the nearly identical ensemble that accompanies the 'Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi' in the Raganaldus Sacramentary, illuminated at Tours around 850 (Autun, Bib. mun. MS 19 bis, fol. 11^v): Koehler et al., *Kar. Min., Band 1*, 1, 245–250.



FIGURE 1.11 Gospels as Fountain of Life (ca. 835). *Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathedrale, tresor, fol. 1r.*

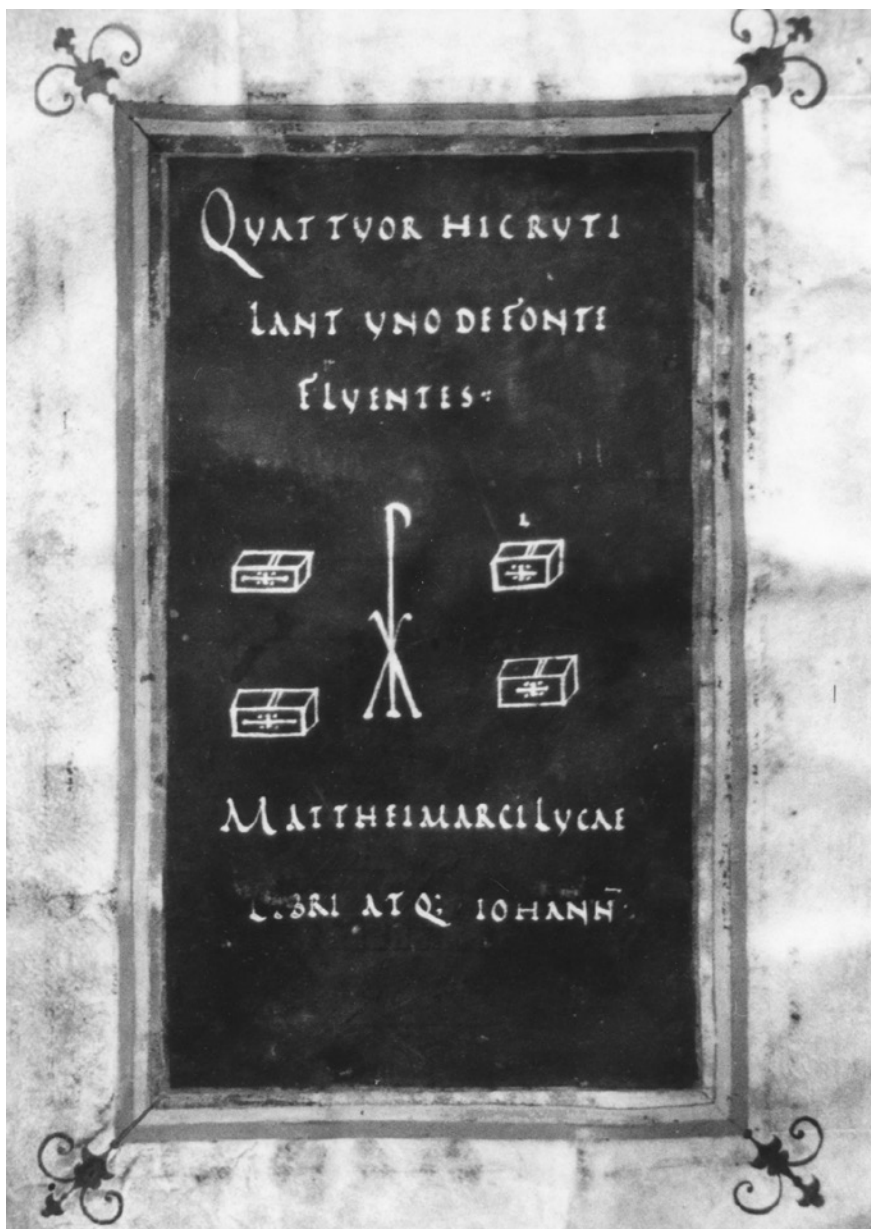


FIGURE 1.12 Gospels as Fountain of Life (ca. 835). *Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathedrale, tresor, fol. 2r.*



FIGURE 1.13 Majestas Agni (ca. 835). *Manuscript illumination. Nancy, Cathedrale, tresor fol. 3r.*

corners. The upright cross encircled by a gold nimbus may well have been understood as the tree of life at the center of Eden, with which the cross was long equated; that would explain the seraphim flanking it—the one at the left with wings covered with eyes and the other with unadorned wings—a reference to the guardians of Paradise, as illustrated in the Codex Albeldense (Vigilanus) of ca. 976, for instance (Escorial, MS. D.1.2, fol. 17^v) [Fig. 1.14],³² in which an enormous tree framed by a yellow nimbus, standing for Eden, is flanked by two seraphim (their wings differentiated in the same fashion) holding liturgical flabella; a second circle at the tree's base is the fountain from which four streams emerge to water the earth. The Nancy Gospel's distinctly liturgical character suggests that the heavenly creatures may also refer to the cherubim on either side of the altar in the tabernacle/temple, as featured in Theodulf of Orléans's apse mosaic in Germigny des Près, for instance, and represented later in the Bible of San Paolo fuori le Mura (Rome, Monastery of San Paolo f. l. m., fol. 32^v).³³ Such cherubim also flank Christ in the *Majestas Domini* page of the Metz Sacramentary, there representing the heavenly court where, according to Isaiah, they continually sing the Lord's praises; their Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus was, of course, repeated during Mass before the consecration of the bread and wine. 'Seraphim' of much the same sort also flank the enthroned Christ in the *Majestas Domini* on the previous folio of the Codex Albedensis (fol. 16^v) [Fig. 1.15] where, as in the Carolingian Bibles, it is the counterpart of the Fall of Adam and Eve depicted facing it (also featuring an enormous yellow-nimbed tree).

32 Fernández Gonzáles E. – Galván Freile F., "Iconografía, Ornamentación y Valor Simbólico de la Imagen", in García Turza J. (ed.), *Códice Albeldense, 976: Original Conservado en la Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial (d.I.2)* (Madrid: 2002); Iacobini A., "L'albero della vita nell'immaginario medievale: Bisanzio e l'Occidente", in Romanini A.M. – Cadei A. (eds.), *L'architettura medievale in Sicilia: la cattedrale di Palermo* (Rome: 1994) 241–290; and Silva y Verástegui S. de, "L'illustration des manuscrits de la collection canonique Hispana", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 31 (1989) 247–261.

33 See Kessler H.L., "Through the Temple Veil: The Holy Image in Judaism and Christianity," *Kairos* 32/33 (1990/91) 53–77 [repr. in Kessler H.L., *Studies in Pictorial Narrative* (London: 1994) 49–73]; and Hamburger J., "Body vs. Book: The Trope of Visibility in Images of Christian-Jewish Polemic", in Ganz D. – Lentjes T. (eds.), *Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren. Bildtheorie und Bildgebrauch in der Vormoderne* (Berlin: 2004) 112–145.



FIGURE 1.14 Paradise (976). Manuscript illumination. Escorial, ms. D.1.2, fol. 17r.



FIGURE 1.15 Majestas Domini (976). Manuscript illumination. Escorial, ms. D.1.2, fol. 16^v.

Geometry and Meaning

In a most significant transformation, the designer of the *Majestas agni* in the Nancy Gospels inserted the fountain trope, with its implicit centrality, into a strict geometric structure based on the rhombus. A version of the more familiar circular diagram pictured above Eden in the Codex Albeldense, the 'orbe' of the first titulus is transformed in the third into a parallelogram representing the world in the broadest sense, as it is diagrammed in the more or less contemporary astronomical compendium in Vienna (Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 387, fol. 134^r) [Fig. 1.16].³⁴ The inner field of the latter is trisected into the continents and the corners terminate in circles marked as the four cardinal directions; and the triangular areas left between rhombus and frame are occupied by disks representing the four elements and their four characteristics, with fire and air at the top and earth and water at the bottom.³⁵ Referred to as the 'tetragonus mundus' in a number of ninth-century texts, the rhomboid universe had been introduced on coins produced for Charlemagne before 806 (and later on those of Lothar and Charles the Bald) [Fig. 1.17];³⁶ and Alcuin, who was the abbot of St. Martin's at Tours between 796 and 804, structured his *Versus de sancta cruce ad Carolum* in Bern (Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 212, fol. 123^r) around the angular form of *mundus, orbis*, 'sealed' by a cross, the 'salvation that the earth's ruler has provided'.³⁷ Alcuin's notion was interpolated into the *In principio* initial of the Bible in Zurich (Zentralbibliothek, Cod. Car CI, fol. 6^r) [Fig. 1.18], produced at St. Martin's when the Nancy Gospels and Bamberg Bible were being illuminated in nearby Marmoutier, there standing for the created world and Christ's presence in it from the beginning and hence a direct antecedent for

34 Schade H., "Hinweise zur frühmittelalterliche Iconographie", *Das Münster* 11 (1958) 375–392; Meyer H.B., "Zur Symbolik frühmittelalterlichen Majestasbilder", *Das Münster* 14 (1961) 73–88; Schmid, *Moutier-Grandval* 157–65; Kessler, *Bibles* 43–46; Tilghman B.C., "The Shape of the Word: Extralinguistic Meaning in Insular Display Lettering", *Word and Image* 27 (2011) 292–308.

35 In the First Bible of Charles the Bald, an attempt was made to suit the imagery to the geometric schema by positioning John's etherial eagle at the top and Luke's ponderous ox at the bottom, so that God's head is understood as being in heaven and his feet on earth.

36 I am grateful to Martin Hirsch, Konservator of the Staatliche Münzsammlung, for providing me with the photograph.

37 Ernst U., *Carmen Figuratum. Geschichte des Figurengedichts von den antiken Ursprüngen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Cologne – Weimar – Vienna: 1991) 168–178; and Chazelle C., *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge: 2001) 14–16.

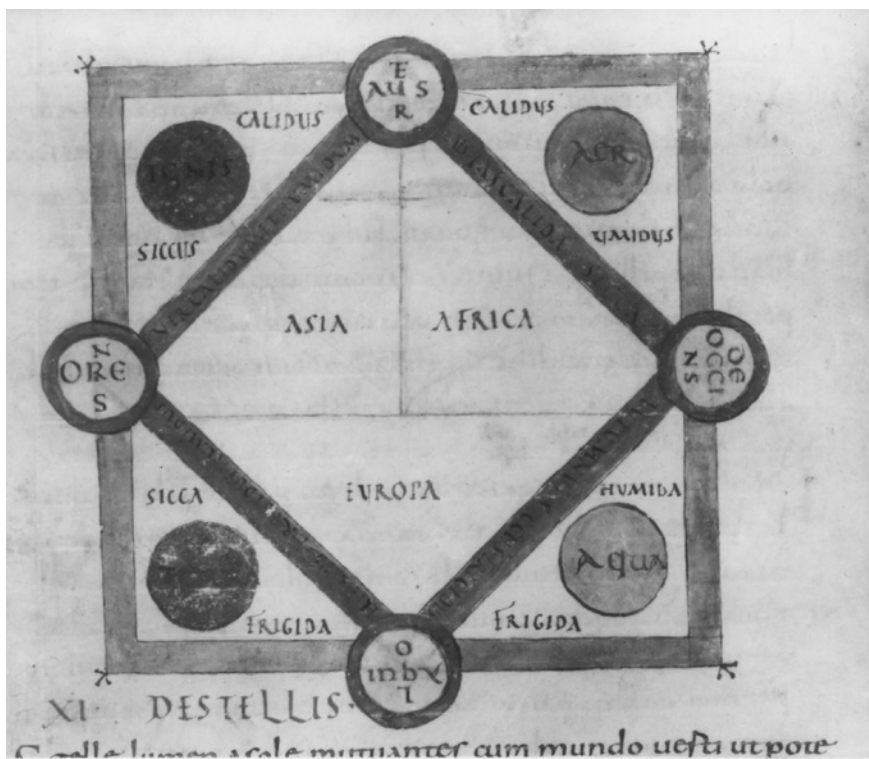


FIGURE 1.16 Cosmological Map (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 387, fol. 134^r.

the Genesis initial in the slightly later First Bible of Charles the Bald.³⁸ And the same reference may explain the shape's deployment to organize Christ's monogram in the uppermost disk adorning John's Gospel in Lothar's Gospelbook (fol. 172^r) [Fig. 1.19], another but different *In principio*, bearing directly on the Savior's Incarnation at the start of the famous prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [...] And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth' (*John* 1:1–14).³⁹

A more complicated version of circle, rhombus, and rectangle constructed with straight-edge and compass in the simpler depictions is evident on the recto of the *Majestas Domini* in the First Bible of Charles the Bald (fol. 329^r) [Fig. 1.20] and reflects the increased interest in diagrams during the Carolingian

38 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 1, 374–75 et passim.

39 See: Hamburger J., *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 2002).



FIGURE 1.17 Denarius of Charles the Bald (9th century). Coin. Munich, Staatliche Münzsammlung München.

period, most derived from antique scientific and mathematical treatises.⁴⁰ It is surely no mere coincidence that Boethius's *De arithmetica* was not only known at Tours but was also issued there in a luxury edition (Bamberg,

40 Kühnel B., *The End of Time in the Order of Things: Science and Eschatology in Early Medieval Art* (Regensburg: 2003); Garipzanov I., "Metamorphoses of the Early Medieval *signum* of a Ruler in the Carolingian World", *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2006) 419–464; idem, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)* (Leiden: 2008); Müller K., *Visuelle Weltaneignung. Astronomische und kosmologische Diagramme in Handschriften des Mittelalters* (Göttingen: 2008); and idem, "Gott ist (k)eine Sphäre. Visualisierungen des Göttlichen in geometrisch-abstrakten Diagrammen des Mittelalters", in Hoeps R. (ed.), *Handbuch der Bildtheologie* (Paderborn: 2014) 311–335; Ramirez-Weaver E., *Saving Science at Charlemagne's Court—The Renewal of the Pagan Past and Astronomy for Christian Clerics* (University Park, PA forthcoming).

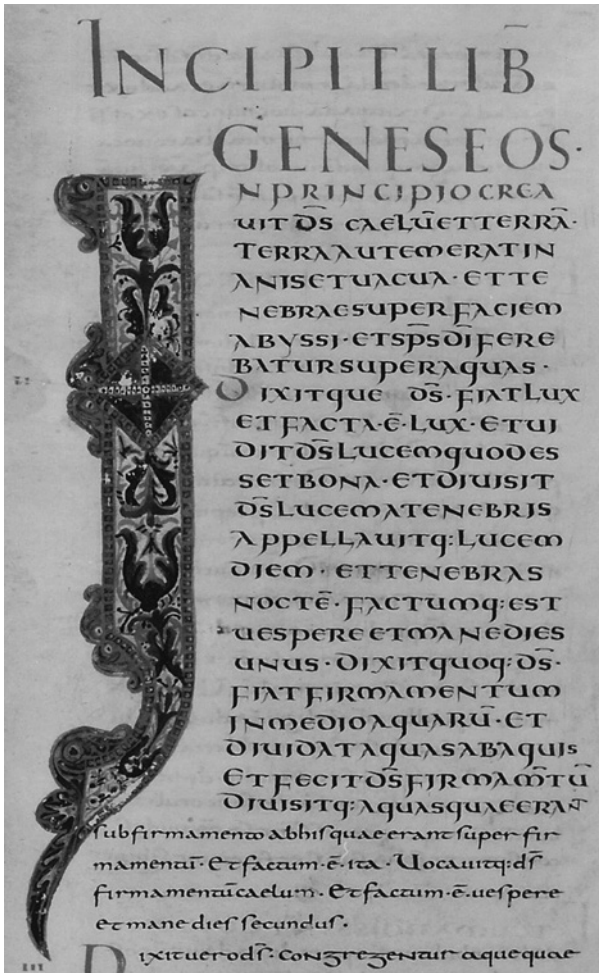


FIGURE 1.18 “Genesis” initial (ca. 840). Manuscript illumination. Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Cod. Carci, fol. 6r.

Staatsbibliothek, MS Class. 5 [H J IV 12])⁴¹ precisely at the moment the biblical manuscripts were being illuminated. In fact, the final and most complex of the Boethian demonstrations, “Concerning the Greatest and Most Perfect Symphony Shown in Three Intervals” (Book II.54), i.e., Geometry, Arithmetic, Harmonics, and Consonances, is illustrated in a composition that recalls the *Majestas* pictures, with bust medallions in the corners and a cross pattern at the center (fol. 73^r) [Fig. 1.21]. And, not surprising, the complicated pattern

41 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min.*, Band 1, 1, 235–236, 401–402.



FIGURE 1.19 Opening of John's Gospel (849). *Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 266, fol. 172^r.*

and disks were also mimicked on the opening page of John's text in the Lothar Gospels; the geometry demonstrates the harmony of the Gospels and, indeed, of all Scripture and, at the same time, makes manifest the divine foundations of Christ's Incarnation.

Moreover, the Touronian illustrations are not the only Carolingian works that deployed geometry to reveal spiritual content. A short tract on the Eucharist by an otherwise unknown theologian who called himself Eldefonsus of Spain provides more evidence of ninth-century fascination with geometry and the interplay of shapes, words, and significance it generated.⁴² Written only some three months before the First Bible of Charles the Bald was finished, apparently at Corbie, the tract survives in three ninth-century exemplars, including one in the Vatican (BAV, Cod. lat. 1341, fol. 188^r) [Fig. 1.22] which diagrams the author's imputation of meaning in the wafer's round shape and various arrangements of Hosts on the altar. Eldefonsus interpreted the largest of five Hosts laid out in a quincux pattern to symbolize the *Agnus Dei*, for example;⁴³ and he assigned the same significance to a slightly different configuration of it that underlies the Touronian counterparts: 'the five arranged in the middle in the form of a cross signify the evangelists and God's only begotten Son, who redeemed humankind on the cross'.⁴⁴ Having found meaning in the Host's circular shape itself and the wafers' simpler arrangements, Eldefonsus also elaborated more complex patterns, giving over much of his discussion to the ways a priest should organize Hosts on the altar according to number and geometry appropriate to the liturgical calendar. On Christmas, to cite one case, he proposed that five wafers be set out in a cross pattern and encircled by twelve others signifying the choirs of angels. For his arrangements, Eldefonsus seems to have turned to cosmological diagrams or at least to the principles embodied in the scientific demonstrations, as illustrated, for instance, in the concordance of months and signs of the zodiac in an early ninth-century astronomical compendium in Laon (Bib. mun., MS 422, fol. 34^r) [Fig. 1.23].⁴⁵ He also drew the incarnational implications; when properly understood, he asserted, ten of the

42 See Reynolds R., "Christ's Money: Eucharistic Azyme Hosts in the Ninth Century According to Bishop Eldefonsus of Spain: Observations on the Origin, Meaning, and Context of a Mysterious Revelation", *Peregrinations: Medieval Art and Architecture* 4 (2013) 1–69; idem, "Eucharistic Adoration"; and idem, "Vetera analecta", *Peregrinations: Medieval Art and Architecture* 4 (2013) 154–172.

43 Reynolds, "Vetera analecta" 161: 'Agnus in medio significatus'.

44 Ibidem 157–158: '[. . .] et in medio quinque in cruces modum ad significandos Evangelistas, et unicum Filium, quem testantur quasi undique sustinentes, pro redemptione generis humani olim crucifixum'.

45 Kühnel, *End of Time* 168.

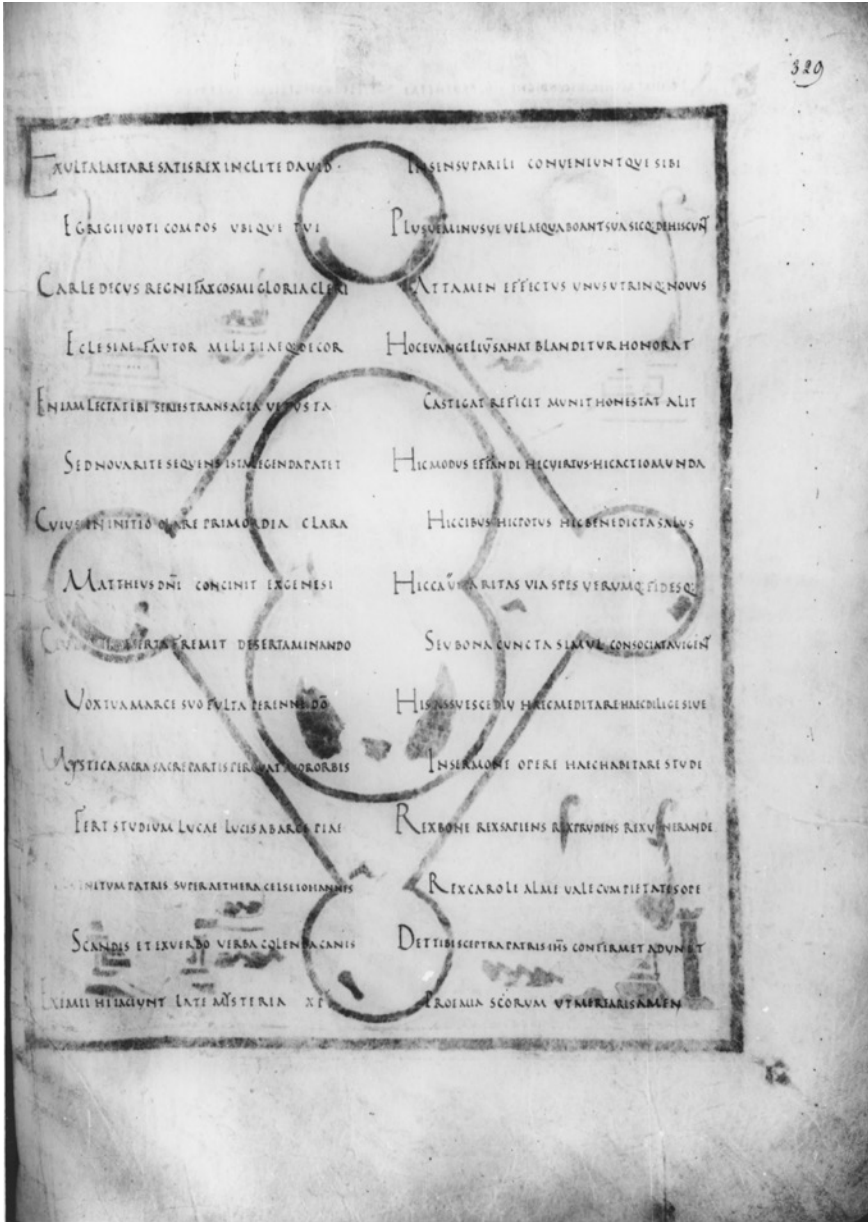


FIGURE 1.20 Majestas Poem (845). *Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 329r.*

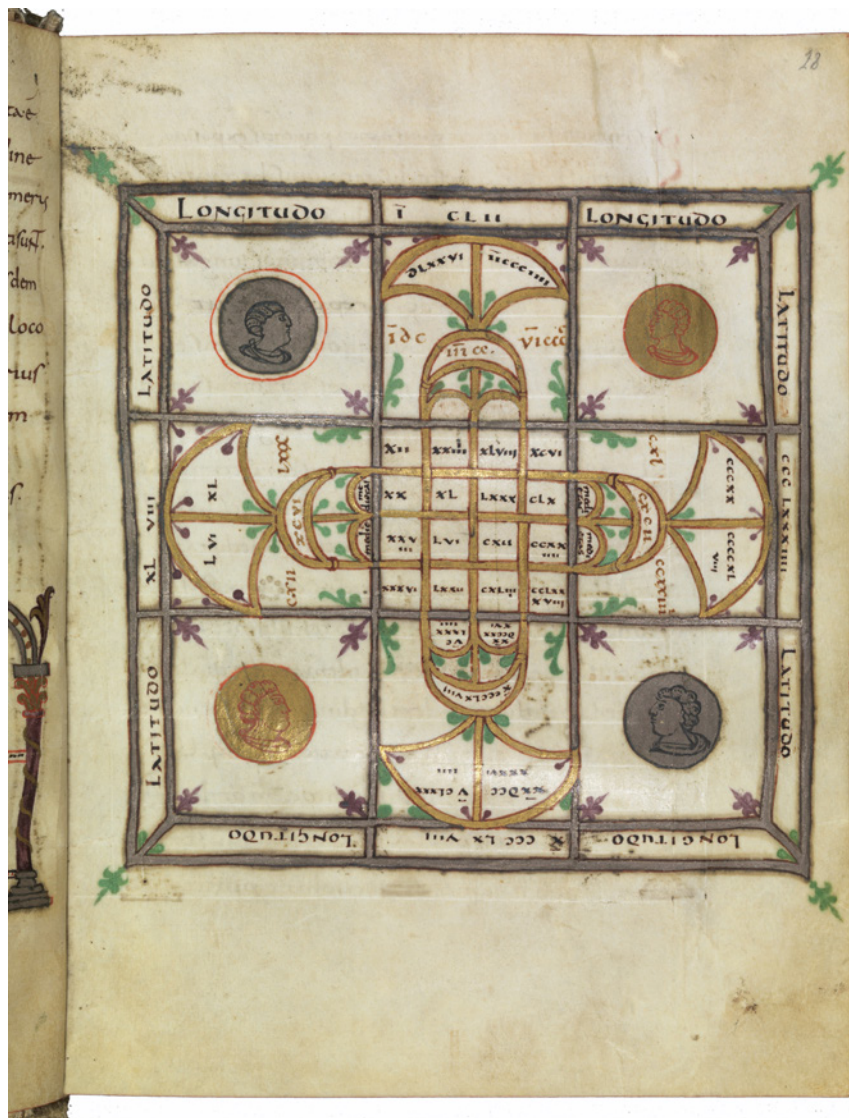


FIGURE 1.21 Illustration of Boethius' *De arithmetica* (ca. 845). *Manuscript illumination. Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Class. 5 [H.J IV 12]*, fol. 28r.

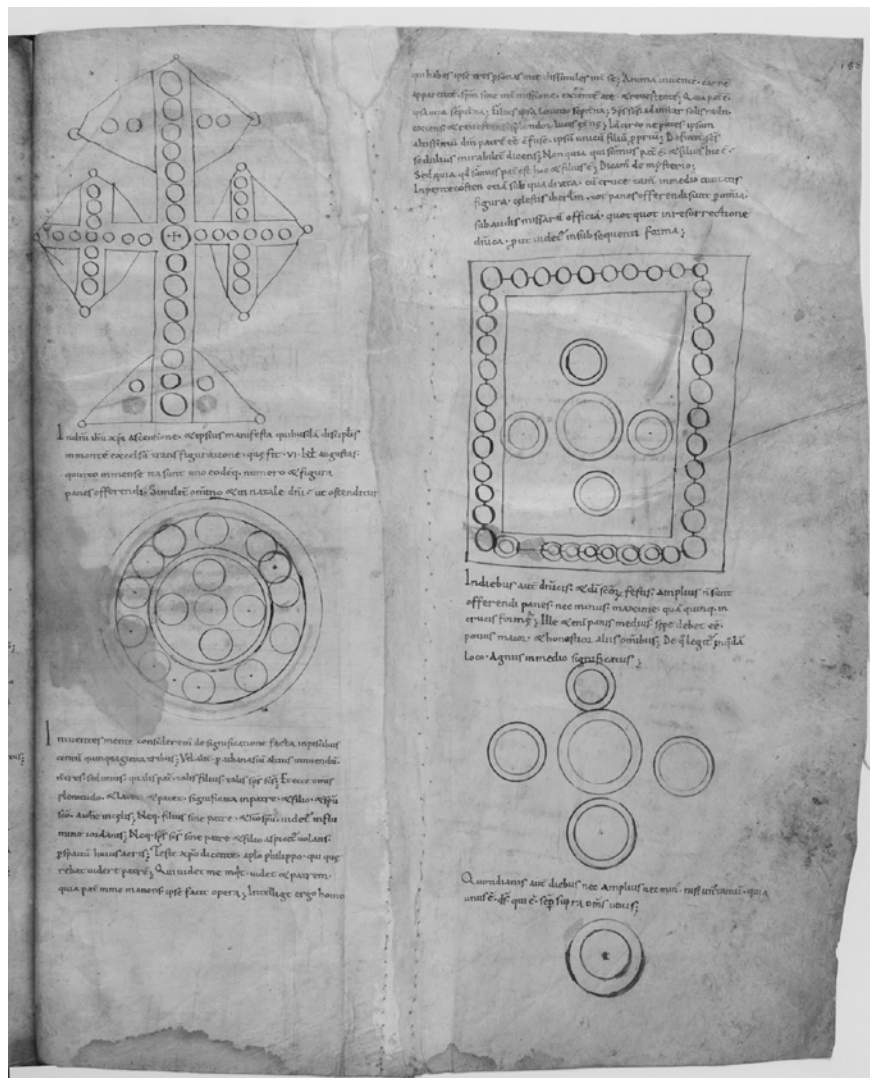


FIGURE 1.22 Hosts Diagram (9th century). *Manuscript illumination. Vatican, BAV, Cod. lat. 1341, fol. 188r.*

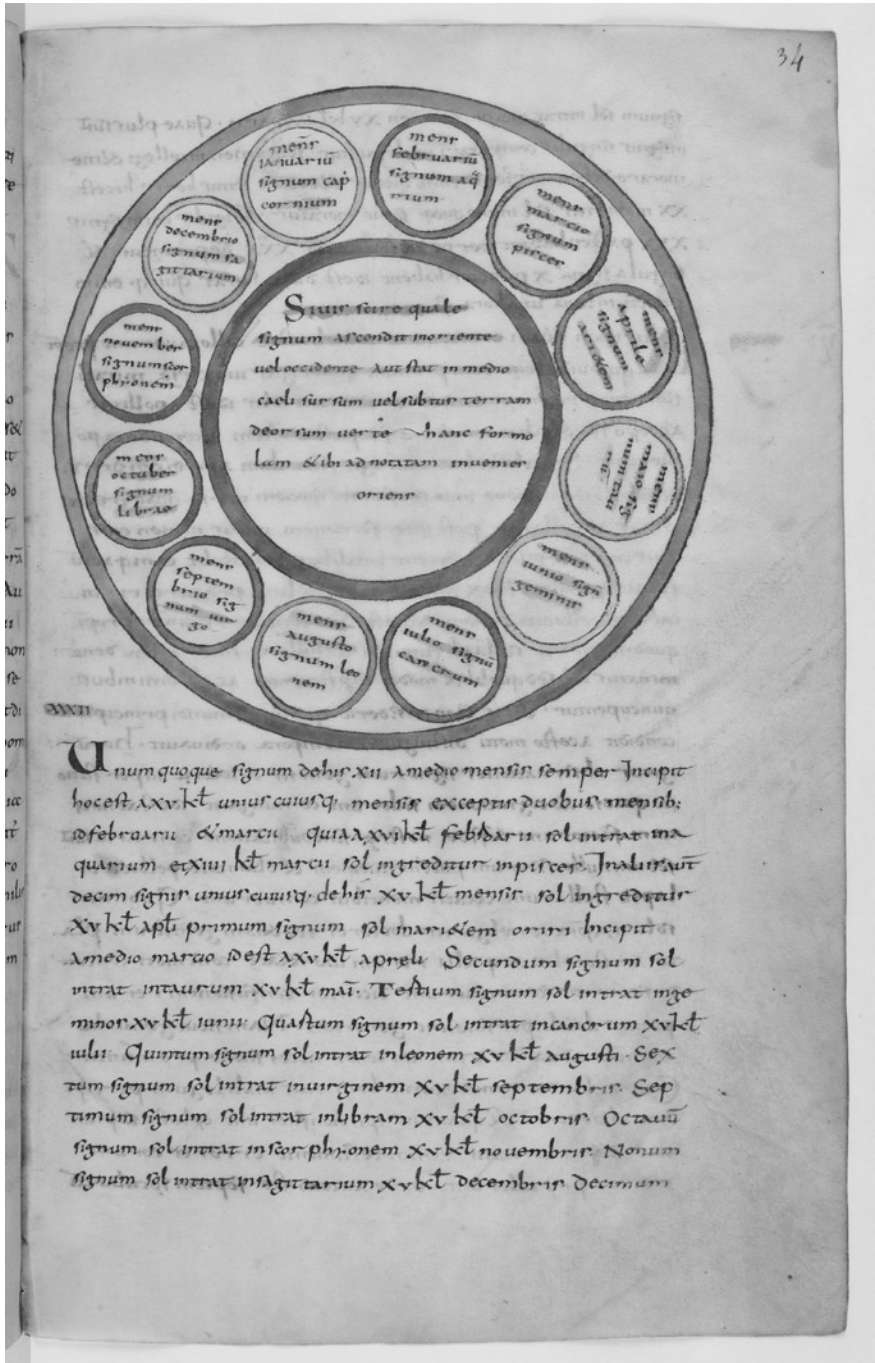


FIGURE 1.23 Cosmological Diagram (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Laon, Bib. mun., MS 422, fol. 34^r.

seventeen circles represent the ‘the Man God created by being born in the flesh and being created in human image formed in the Virgin Mary’ plus seven representing the ‘sevenfold Holy Spirit’ of *Revelation* 1:10. Something of this play of object and subject may also be at work in the opening image of the Nancy Gospels, where the rings of small circles around crosses that adorn the book (altar) recall Eldefonsus’ diagrams.⁴⁶

For Eldefonsus, the circle is the fundamental geometric shape and, itself, an index of God’s having neither beginning nor end and being motionless at the center.⁴⁷ A diagram preserved in another ninth-century manuscript of his treatise in Paris (BnF, MS lat. 2855, fol. 63^v) [Fig. 1.24], deploys the perfect form to encompass the complex figure that Eldefonus saw in a vision, namely, a Host dominated by a cross at its centerpoint—emphatically marked by a large dot—and identified as Christ whose ‘feet on earth are the way, whose head in heaven is the truth, and whose life remaining in the middle of his breast, restoring holiness.’⁴⁸ Many of Christ’s names—King, God, Jesus Christ—and various epithets—light, peace, glory, life, truth, way⁴⁹—are found also on the Tournian *Majestas Domini* pictures; and, indeed, the inclusion of Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke also marked by points (John’s is missing) between the cross’s arms and Eldefonsus’ accompanying meditation on Ezekiel’s vision of the four beasts and wheels within wheels make it clear that the diagrammed Host is, in essence, a schematic representation of the *Majestas* composition created at Tours.⁵⁰

46 Reynolds, “Eucharistic Adoration” 114–115.

47 Reynolds, “Vetere Analecta” 155: ‘Ecce puncta, quae in rotis sunt picta, retro quinque acta, et rotae, id est puncta, ostendunt quod nec initium habet Deus in medio manens, nec finem, sicut nec puncta, nec rota per gyrum’.

48 Reynolds, “Vetere Analecta” 155: ‘Si est via pedum in terris, est veritas capitis in caelis, vita pectoris est in medio manens, reddenda sanctis’.

49 Except for Pax, these are precisely the words applied to Christ in the Tournian Bibles and, to the earthly ruler in the poem preceding the *Majestas* in the First Bible of Charles the Bald; see Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Painting* 112–115. See also: Kessler H.L., “Christ’s Name as Image and Object,” in *Heilige Namen*, Ferrari, M. (forthcoming).

50 Reynolds, “Vetere Analecta” 156: ‘Intuemini, iuxta fluvium Chobar, Ezechielem prophetam colluctantem et colloquentem apud quinque rotas et quatuor animalia, unumquodque animal habente per quadrum quatuor facies in unoquoque capite, dum esset rota in rotis, consistens loco medio. Infra tria etenim puncta, intra quae sunt duae quasi prae omnibus rebus columnae, Trinitas est, infra se habens omnia, quamquam in medio sedeat dum omnes in circuitu sint offerentes munera. Si est via pedum in terris, est veritas capitis in caelis, vita pectoris est in medio manens, reddenda sanctis’.

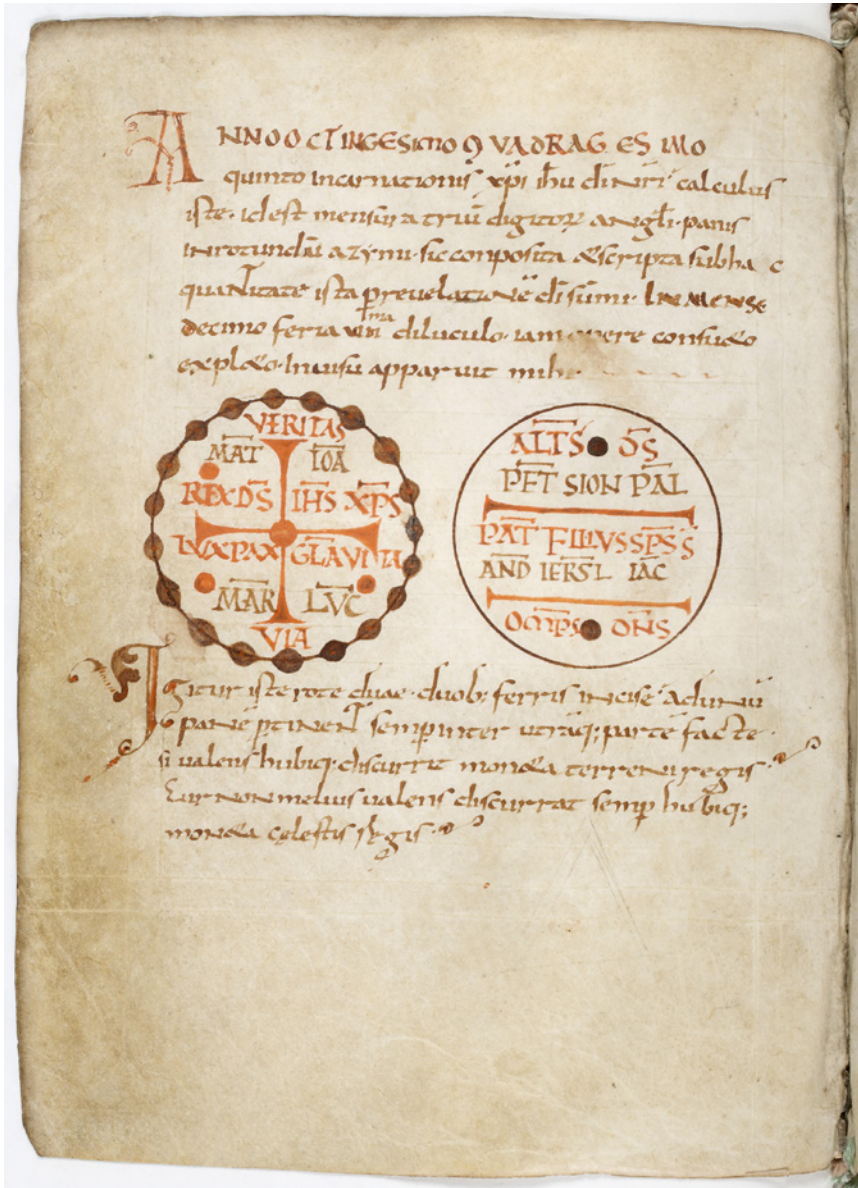


FIGURE 1.24 Host (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, Ms lat. 2855, fol. 63^r.

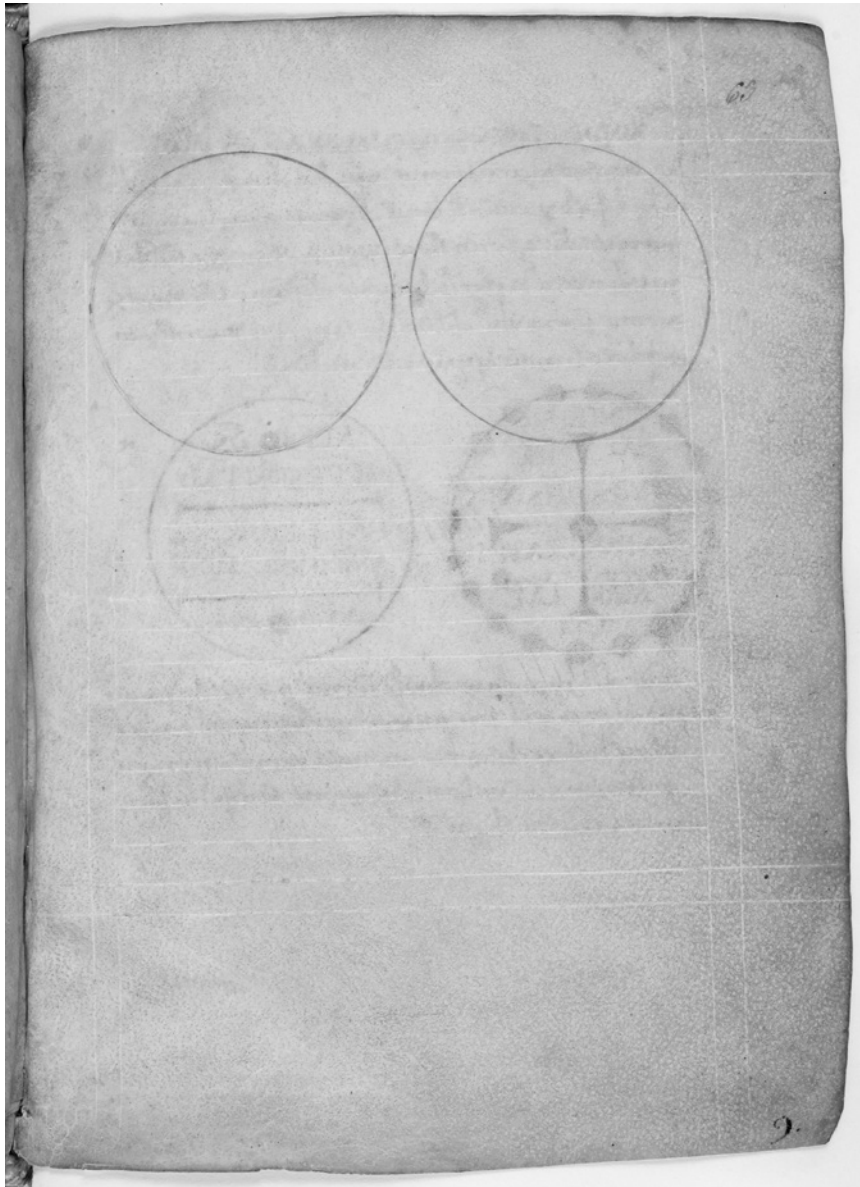


FIGURE 1.25 Circles (9th century). *Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 2855, fol. 63r.*

Eldefonsus maintained that the Trinity, too—comprising the living soul, the visible flesh, and the spirit left without interruption⁵¹—may be recognized in the wafer's geometry. Nevertheless, he felt the need to make the claim explicit on the Host's reverse by identifying the persons of the Triune God in the middle line: PAT[ER] FILIVS SP[IRITU]S S[ANCTUS], adding the epithets: ALT[ISSIMU]S D[EU]S at the top and OM[NI]P[OTEN]S D[OMI]N[US] at the bottom, SION over IER[U]S[A]L[EM] and PET[RUS] and PA[U]L[US] above AND[REAS] and IAC[OPUS]. What is more, the fascination with circles and midpoints is documented by two circles (empty except for their compass points) on the page that precedes the Eucharistic tract in the Paris codex (fol. 63^r) [Fig. 1.25]; even if they are only discarded preliminary drawings, the circles introduce the text that follows with its continuous and insistent interpretation of geometrical forms.

Geometry, Word, Body

Long before Eldefonsus found meaning in the geometry of the Eucharist, Paulinus of Nola, in a text that Carolingian theologians quoted, had disclosed the significance of the shapes of the letters constituting the chrismon, teasing out of the monogram a sign of God's willingness to be born in the flesh.⁵² And in an important prediction of the ninth-century demonstrations, Beatus of

51 Ibidem 160: 'Ergo, intellige, homo, qui habes ipse tres personas in te, dissimiles inter se: animam viventem, carnem apparentem, spiritum sine intermissione existentem.'

52 "Poema 19" (PL 61.544–547):
 'Eloquitur Dominum tamquam monogrammate Christum.
 Nam nota, qua bis quinque notat numerante Latino
 Calculus, haec Graecis chi scribitur, et mediata rho
 Cujus apex et signa tenet, quod rursus ad ipsam.
 Curvatum virgam, facit o velut orbe peracto.
 Nam rigor obstipus facit quod in Hellade iota est.
 Tau idem stylus ipse brevi retro acumine ductus
 Efficit, atque ita sex, quibus omni nomine nomen
 Celsius exprimitur, coeunt elementa sub uno
 Indice, et una tribus firmatur littera virgis.
 Sex itaque una notas simul exprimit, ut tribus una
 Significet virgis Dominum simul esse ter unum.
 Et Deus in Christo est, quem sumpto corpore nasci
 Pro nobis voluit trinae concordia mentis.
 Idque sacramenti est, geminae quod in utraque virgae
 Ut diducta pari fastigia fine supinant,
 Infra autem distante situ parili pede constant,

Liebana interpreted the alpha and omega of the *Book of Revelation* in Trinitarian terms; and, in his *In Apocalypsin* of 776–86, he extended the exegesis to the circular letter O:

Composed of three strokes of equal size, the shape of the letter A is, itself, the same in Greek as in Latin. It is not without reason that our ancestors said that [the tripartite form] represented the unity of the divinity. In Greek, the ω is written with three equal strokes yoked together and elevated. In Latin, however, the O is closed with the roundness of a circle. Surely, in this closed form containing everything, it manifests the divinity's protection. Furthermore, it pertains to a system of the elements and letters, these elements are the origins and end of the knowledge and the art of leading the ignorant to wisdom. Accordingly, the alpha, beginning of wisdom, teaches that Christ, the Son of God, is that wisdom; the omega, which is the end, the A and Ω in Greek and O, which with us, occupies an intermediate position. This means that the beginning of wisdom, the end, and what is between the two are the same Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man.⁵³

Affixaeque sibi media compage cohaerent,
 Et paribus spectant discreta cacumina summis
 His intermedio coeuntibus insita puncto
 Virga velut sceptrum regale superbius exstat,
 Significans regnare Deum super omnia Christum
 Qui cruce dispansa per quatuor extima ligni
 Quatuor attingit dimensum partibus orbem,
 Ut trahat ad vitam populos ex omnibus oris.
 Et quia morte crucis cunctis Deus omnia Christus
 Exstat in exortum vitae, finemque malorum,
 Alpha crucem circumstat, et ω tribus utraque virgis
 Littera diversam terna ratione figuram
 Perficiens, quia perfectum est mens una, triplex vis.
 Alpha itidem mihi Christus, et ω qui summa supremis
 Finibus excelsi pariter complexus, et imi
 Victor et inferna, et pariter caelestia cepit,
 Effractisque abysis caelos penetravit apertos,
 Victricem referens superata morte salutem.
 Utque illum patriae junxit victoria dextrae,
 Corporeum statuit coelesti in sede tropaeum'.

53 *Tractatus de Apocalypsin*, ed. R. Gryson, CCL 107B (Turnhout: 2012) Book I, chap. 1: 'In latino autem, O quadam circuli rotunditate concluditur. Nam et in hac conclusione continens omnia, et protegens diuinitas declaratur. Porro quod ad elementorum ac litterarum

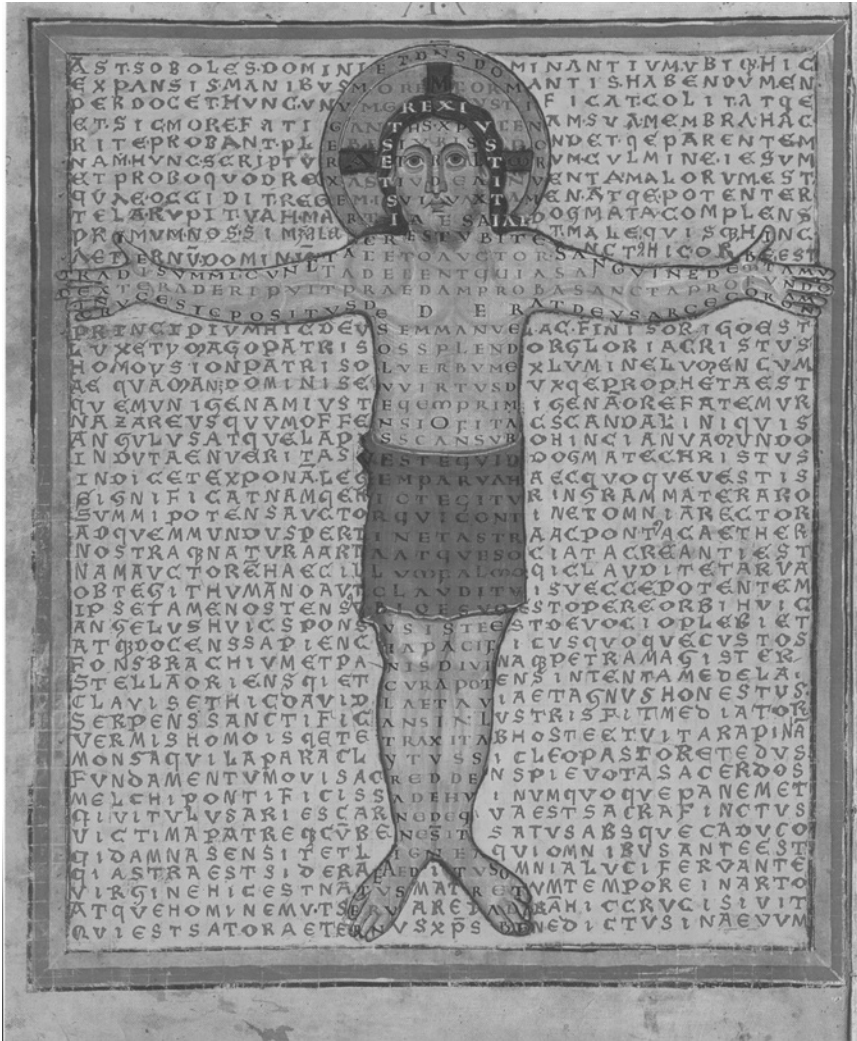


FIGURE 1.26 Crucifixion (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Vatican, BAV Cod. Reg. lat. 124, fol. 8^r.

Paulinus' and Beatus' deconstructions of the relationship between letters, words, and geometry underlie two characteristic Carolingian developments, the evolution of historiated initials and the revival of *carmina figurata*; and,

pertinet rationem, helementa hęc scientię sunt initii et finis et quedam ars stultos ad sapientiam ducens. [...] apud nos medietas quedam habetur. Significat et initium sapientie et complementum et medietatem, ipsum esse Dominum Ihesum Christum, mediatorem Dei et hominum'.

indeed, Alcuin's use of the rhombus to structure his poem suggests a direct relationship among the experiments. So, too, does the application of the process to Christ's body in the Crucified Christ of *In honorem sanctae crucis* by Alcuin's student, Hrabanus Maurus (as in the Vatican exemplar, BAV Cod. Reg. lat. 124, fol. 8^v) [Fig. 1.26], in which the circular cross nimbus, inscribed with the letters, A, M, and ω, is interpreted as signifying the beginning and middle and end through which all things are comprehended; and the final letter O of ORDO IUSTUS DEO is made to form Christ's umbilicus because, just as O is the mid-point of the Latin alphabet, it is also the center of the Savior's body.⁵⁴ The *Majestas Domini* of the Codex Albeldense asserts the same argument, literally, by positioning the enthroned God between large Greek letters, the Alpha at the top and Omega at the bottom, with Christ's globe throne functioning as the Latin O; and the Rodez relief maps the idea directly onto Christ's person, framing the Mediator with the Greek letters and forming the garments of his abdomen into the rotund letter form.

World or Wafer?

This fascination with geometry, in particular with the circle, generated two other distinctive innovations of the *Majestas Domini*, the disk Christ is shown holding in his right hand and the figure-eight mandorla constructed of intersecting rings (of which the center points are clearly visible on the recto). The small gold disk encircled in red that Christ proffers between the thumb and one finger of his right hand in the First Bible of Charles the Bald and in most, though not all, of the related *Majestas Domini* compositions, has been much discussed.⁵⁵ It would seem to be the world as represented on Late Antique consular diptychs and on a contemporary ivory in the Museo nazionale del Bargello in Florence, which depicts King David enthroned and holding an orb in much the same fashion [Fig. 1.27].⁵⁶ In that case, it would be the counterpart to the cosmos brought into being through Christ's agency in the Bible's Genesis initial, the 'auctor sanctus hic orbe est', as Hrabanus Maurus called him in the *In Honorem*

54 *In honorem sancti crucis*, 33: 'In uultu quoque et mento, papillis et umbilico, continetur istud: ORDO IUSTUS DEO [...] In cruce namque quae iuxta caput eius posita est, sunt tres litterae, hoc est A, M, et ω, quod significat initium et medium et finem ab ipso omnia comprehendi'.

55 Most recently by Frese T., *Aktual- und Realpräsenz. Das eucharistische Christusbild von der Spätantike bis ins Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: 2013) 141–165.

56 Goldschmidt A., *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser VIII.–XI. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1914) 57–58; and Gaborit-Chopin D., *Ivoires du Moyen Age* (Paris: 1978) 68–69.



FIGURE 1.27 David (ca. 850). Ivory. Florence, Museo del Bargello. Detail. Author's archive.

Sanctae Crucis.⁵⁷ The titulus in the San Paolo Bible seems to confirm such an identification: 'Sedet throni residens mundum qui ponderat omnem',⁵⁸ as do the verses accompanying the *Majestas* in the Codex Aureus of San Emmeram: 'Christus [...] librat tetragonum miro discrime mundum';⁵⁹ and the titulus framing the related picture in the Codex Albeldense, which paraphrases Isaiah: 'He enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure'. The Girona Beatus of 975 (Girona, Cathedral, Inv. 7, fol. 2^r),⁶⁰ which is closely related to these compositions, actually labels the disk Christ holds: 'mundus'. Not surprising, then, that as recently as 2005, Jean-René Gaborit still maintained that the 'petite sphere [in the Rodez relief] est l'*orbis mundi*, signe de puissance, hérité de l'iconographie imperial de la Basse Antiquité'.⁶¹

As Schapiro already argued half a century ago, however, the way Christ presents the object between his fingers and the gold surface indicate that the disk is, in fact, meant to represent the Eucharistic wafer. Schapiro cited a Touronian sacramentary still in the city where it was made during the third quarter of the ninth century (Bibliothèque municipale, MS. 184), which pictures a priest consecrating the sacred species depicted as a golden wafer atop a silver paten alongside a chalice (fol. 3^r).⁶² Even more important for the disk's identification is an initial in the same manuscript that represents the Hand of God in a gold-framed magenta circle in the V of *vere dignum* holding between the thumb and forefinger a red-ringed gold disk very much like the one in the First Bible (fol. 2^r) [Fig. 1.28]. The context in the Preface to the Canon of the Mass leaves little

57 *In honorem sancti crucis* 27.

58 Gaehde J., "La decorazione. Le Miniature", in Arnaldi G. (ed.), *Commentario storico paleografico artistico critico della Bibbia di San Paolo fuori le Mura (Codex membranaceus saeculi IX)* (Rome: 1993) 248–249, 289–291.

59 The frontispiece picturing Christ's hand is accompanied by the caption: 'Dextera quae patris mundum ditione gubernat/ Protegat et Karolum semper ab hoste suum'. The tituli are still cited as the work of Alcuin, an idea long since refuted; *Iohannis Scotti Erivgenae Carmina*, ed. M. Herren (Dublin: 1993) 24, 132.

60 Silva y Verástegui S. de, "Tradición hispana e influencias exteriores en la miniature en el Rein de Pamplona durate los siglos X y XI", *Cuadernos de la Cátedra de Partimonio y Arte Navarro* 3 (2008) 51–86; Guardia M. – Mancho M., "Consideracions a l'entorn dels teixits brodats Catalans de l'alta edat mitjana", *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironinxs* 38 (1996–97) 1455–1479.

61 *France romane* 244.

62 Koehler et al., *Kar. Min., Band I*, 1, 423–25 et passim; Jakobi-Mirwald C., *Text-Buchstabe-Bild. Studien zur historisierten Initiale im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1998) 52; Saxon E., *The Eucharist in Romanesque France: Iconography and Theology* (Woodbridge: 2006) 149–153; and Frese, *Aktual- und Realpräsenz*.



FIGURE 1.28 Hand of God Holding Host (ca. 875). Manuscript illumination. Tours, Bibliothèque municipale, MS. 184, fol. 2r.

doubt that this object is the Host that God sent to earth after he ascended to heaven or, in turn, that the little orb in the First Bible of Charles the Bald and *Majestas Domini* images that followed it is also a Eucharistic wafer. Surely, it is no mere chance that the line of the poem on the *Majestas Domini*'s recto, 'Here is sustenance, here drink, here blessed salvation', begins precisely at the point the wafer is pictured on the verso.⁶³ That the disk marked with a cross in the Auxerre drawing is the Host is confirmed by the leaf's apparent original context in a Sacramentary and its pairing with a Crucifixion, which includes the *Agnus Dei* within a clipeus sectioned by a cross (as also in the St. Gauzelin Gospels), which would, then, be its celestial prototype.⁶⁴

The confusion in modern scholarship about the disk's specific identity may, in fact, be due to a purposeful elision of the difference between Host and cosmos that is traceable back almost to the creation of the iconography, an elision enabled by their common circular form. Eldefonsus himself had allowed for a confusion of a similar sort at the start of his tract when he likened the Host to coins, and then distinguished it from them. Having in mind something like the mould still preserved in the Museu Episcopal in Vic [Fig. 1.29],⁶⁵ he noted that the iron used to produce wafers is inscribed with circles on each side so that it impresses bread in the same manner that money is minted; and then he asked: 'if coins of the earthly king in circulation everywhere are valued, why is the coin of the heavenly king not better, which is always superior everywhere?'⁶⁶ Indeed, in the Paris manuscript containing his tract, the obverses of both the large and small Hosts are ringed with dots to recall real coins (fol. 63^v and 66^v) [Fig. 1.30]; so too are the facsimiles of coins (of David and Charles) that decorate the poem in the First Bible of Charles the Bald (fol. 1^r) [Fig. 1.31], in which the monks exhort the King to 'confer deserved honors upon sacred churches,

63 'Hic cibus, hic potus, hic benedicta salus'; see Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Painting* 114–115.

64 On the Eucharistic implications of the *Majestas Domini* represented in medieval apses, see Angheben M., "Théophanis absidales et liturgie eucharistiques. L'exemple des peintures romanes de Catalogne et du nord des Pyrénées comportant un séraphin et un chérubin", in Guardia M. – Mancho C. (eds.), *Les fonts de la pintura romànica* (Barcelona: 2008) 57–95.

65 Amenós Martínez L., "Hostiers i Neulers medieval del Museu Episcopal de Vic", *Quaderns del Museu Episcopal de Vic*, 1 (2005) 91–113.

66 On coins and Eucharistic wafers, see Kumler A. "The Multiplication of the Species. Eucharistic Morphology in the Middle Ages", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60 (2011) 179–191. Facsimiles of the denarii of the contemporary rulers Alfonso VI and Pedro II are arranged around the Christ in Majesty on a thirteenth-century antependium from Catalonia in Baltimore; see Kessler H.L., "Object as Subject in Medieval Art", *Haskins Society Journal* 23 (2011) 205–228.



FIGURE 1.29 Host Press (12th century). Iron. Vic, Museu Episcopal.

so that you might be worthy of help in holy places', a 'do ut des' specified in the closing verses that urge him to reaffirm the monastery's privilege of immunity 'for [his] own salvation'. It is perhaps in imitation of secular coins bearing the king's monogram, moreover, that the disk the 'heavenly king' proffers in the First Bible of Charles the Bald is imprinted in the form of the chrismon; and, just as coins are, the disk in the Metz Sacramentary is enclosed in two concentric rings of dots which, in this case, extend to the mandorla, the book Christ holds, and the Lord himself whose halo and garments are ornamented in the same way, rendering him as an instrument of exchange. Coins are the *tertium comparationis*, then, the '*moneta coelestis regis*' that identifies Christ as king of heaven and earth and, at the same time, the source of salvation that supersedes all that is in this world.

The *mundus/hostie/moneta* is presented in the First Bible of Charles the Bald and related *Majestas Domini* pictures as the counterpart to the book Christ holds in his left hand. In a certain sense, the paired objects are understood as parallel forms of mediation, to be consumed by the faithful, as the use of 'sapio' implies in the first frontispiece of the St. Gauzelin Gospels and as the poem written in incarnational colors of red and gold on the recto of the first occurrence makes explicit: '[The Bible] is our sustenance, drink, rule, way, arms, and salvation. Here, because the riches of the eternal table fill our vital parts, completely with everlasting nectar. Here the parched will find drink, the

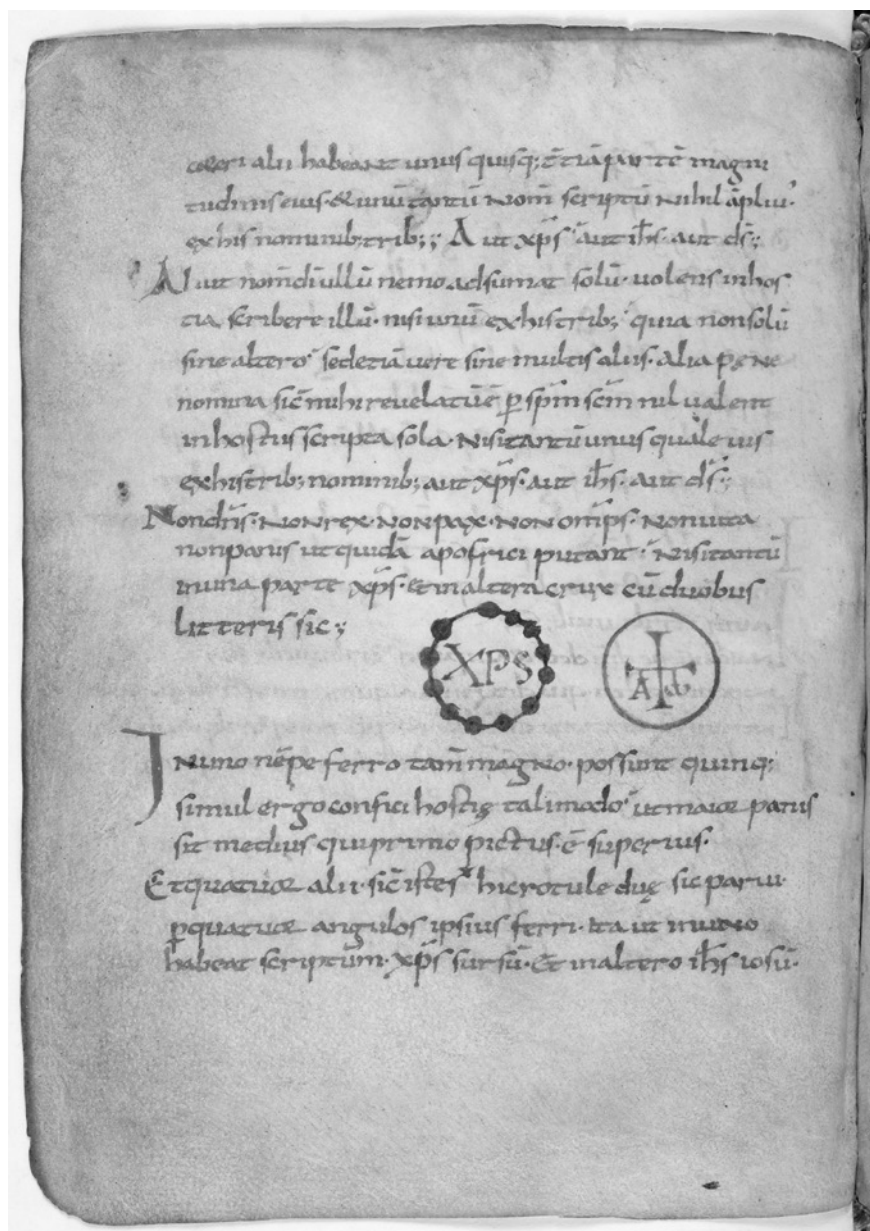


FIGURE 1.30 Hosts (9th century). Manuscript illumination. Paris, MS lat. 2855, fol. 66v.



FIGURE 1.31 Imitation Coins (845). Manuscript illumination. Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1, fol. 1^v.

hungry will find bread.⁶⁷ The book, too, is an instrument of sacred exchange, both the specific Bible in which it was first introduced, made, as the poem declares, so Charles may enjoy everlasting life,⁶⁸ and also Scripture more generally, which is understood as a form of the Mediator's body.⁶⁹

Parallel to an argument made in the (revised) *De corpore et sanguine Domini* that Paschasius Radbertus presented to the King a year before, the Mediator at the front of the Gospels proffering the wafer and book in the First Bible of Charles the Bald is thus the conceptual fulfillment of the Creator of the

67 Franklin C. "Words as Food: Figuring the Bible in the Early Middle Ages," *Comunicare e significare nell'alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo) 52 (2005) 733–764.

68 'Immo magis pro te, Iesu salvator amate, Sis ut ei vitae denique perpetua'; see Dutton – Kessler, *Poetry and Paintings* 120–121.

69 Leclercq J., "Aspects spirituels de la symbolique du livre au XI^e siècle", in *L'homme devant Dieu. Mélanges offerts au Père Henri De Lubac. Exégèse et patristique 1* (Paris: 1964) 63–72; Lentjes T., "Textus Evangelii. Materialität und Inszenierung des Textus in der Liturgie," in Kuchenbuch L. – Kleine U. (eds.), *Textus im Mittelalter. Komponenten und Situationen des Wortgebrauchs im schriftsemantischen Feld* (Göttingen: 2006) 133–148; and Palazzo, "Corps-Livre" and *L'invention*.

universe portrayed opposite the Fall of Adam and Eve.⁷⁰ A perfect complement to the four rivers that replace the chalice of the Marmoutier manuscripts and 'water the entire earth', the Host underscores the belief that the world redeemed through the Incarnation as described in Scripture (including the Scripture embodied in this very manuscript) is made continually available in the Eucharist.

This might explain what seems to be a redundancy in the miniature of Christ's holding what the faithful took to be his own body. Augustine had already noted that, when the Savior instituted the Mass at the Last Supper 'he carried himself in his own hands, entrusting his own body when he said "This is my body", He held his body in his own hands. That is the humility of Jesus Christ our Lord, that is entrusted to many persons'.⁷¹ A generation after the conceiver of the First Bible of Charles the Bald introduced the imagery into the *Majestas Domini* and about the time the Metz Sacramentary was illuminated, Remigius of Auxerre developed the implications of Augustine's incarnational exegesis; in his *Commentum in Psalmos*, the late-Carolingian theologian underscored the relationship between Christ's Incarnation and the Eucharistic species and its transformative effect, concluding that 'God became a man so that man might be God. The Immortal took on mortal form so that mortal beings might receive immortality: He descended so that we might ascend'.⁷²

70 *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, chap. 9, line 3, ed. Paulus B., CCCM 16 (Turnhout, 1969): 'Quodsi ueluti Adam inoboedientes a diabolo rursus peccato mortis perempti fuerint, sicut ille de paradiso remouentur a sanctis altaribus et a ligno uitae, scilicet a corpore et sanguine Christi, qui est uerum paradysi lignum, cuius folium non defluet et omnia quaecumque faciet prosperabuntur. Remouentur autem ne sumant de ligno uitae et male uiuant ut moriantur, immo ut resipiscant a malis suis et per penitentiam reconciliati, Christi per hunc cybum rursus reinserantur uisceribus et feliciter deinceps uiuant in aeternum. Hoc quippe agunt sacerdotes Christi in ecclesia et monstrant quod futurum est in illo ultimo examine, quando separabuntur iusti ab iniustis. Sed hic sicuti Adam expulso spes mansit redeundi ad uitam per penitentiam, ita praecisis a ligno uitae patet facultas, si uelint redire ad ueniam. Vbi cum penitentia intercesserit, certa spes percipitur, quia iam uitae admixtus mori non poterit, si reconciliatus maneat in Christo'. On the Eucharistic controversy see: Chazelle, C., "Figure, Character, and the Glorified Body in the Carolingian Eucharistic Controversy," *Traditio*, 47 (1992), pp. 1–36 and *Crucified God*. The association is explicit in the Codex Albedense on the page facing the *Majestas Domini* which shows Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.

71 *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, E. Dekkers – J. Fraipont (eds.), CCSL 38 (Turnhout: 1956); *Psalm* 33 (34): 'Ferebatur enim Christus in manibus suis, quando commendans ipsum corpus suum, ait: *Hoc est corpus meum*. Ferebat enim illud corpus in manibus suis. Ipsa est humilitas Domini nostri Jesu Christi, ipsa multum commendatur hominibus'.

72 *PL* 131.311: 'Ferebatur in manibus suis, quod in specie, panis magis corpus suum accipere uoluit, quam alia: [...] Ut ergo haec superbia se humiliaret, factus est Deus homo, ut

It is difficult to believe that the attention paid to the azyme Host in the Carolingian manuscripts is not related to the debate that Charles the Bald, Paschasius Radbertus, and members of the court were having at the very same moment over the nature of the Eucharist. Indeed, two of the three copies of Eldefonsus' tract are contained in manuscripts that also include Paschasius' treatise (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 2855 and MS lat. 2077).⁷³ And if, as appears to be the case, the *Majestas Domini* in the First Bible of Charles the Bald pictures Christ twice, once as the incarnate 'rex aetherius' and again in the form of the Host, it would seem to take Paschasius's position over Ratramnus' by juxtaposing what is perceived outwardly by the senses to what is believed inwardly.⁷⁴ To make his case, Paschasius had likened the Eucharist to Old Testament types that offer a material focus capable of raising thoughts to the Divine and distinguished it from them because of its incarnational presence.⁷⁵ The depiction of Christ holding the small disk does the same, first by demonstrating that both bodies are real and the same even if they do not look alike, then by asserting that, while physical images can figure the truth of the Incarnation, unlike the Eucharist, they are not themselves the truth. In turn, the imprinted chrismon cues the process by drawing on Paschasius' argument based on *Hebrews* 1:2–4, that letters and impressed characters make spiritual things visible just as Christ himself made the Divinity's substance present in the Host and wine.⁷⁶ Eldefonsus' vision of the Host appearing at dawn ('diluculo'), like the *Majestas Domini* of the Weingarten Gospels, cosmic map, and coins all present a similar set of claims. And, as Schapiro suggested when he returned to it in his 1968 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (published only in 2006), so did the Rodez relief.⁷⁷ Analyzing how Christ's vestments are translated into a 'second body' on the eleventh-century sculpture, Schapiro paid new attention to the repetition of the shape of the little disk Christ is shown holding in 'partial,

homo fieret Deus. Immortalis formam mortalem induit, ut mortalis assumeret immortalam: descendit ille, ut nos ascenderemus'.

73 Reynolds, "Christ's Money" 32; and Frese, *Aktual- und Realpräsenz*.

74 *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, chap. 4, line 2: 'Sed si ueraciter inspicimus, iure simul ueritas et figura dicitur, ut sit figura uel character ueritatis quod exterius sentitur, ueritas uero quicquid de hoc mysterio interius recte intellegitur aut creditur'.

75 Palazzo, "Corps-Livre" 45 and *L'invention* 266–285.

76 See Nicholas M. Häring, "Character, Signum, und Signaculum: Die Entwicklung bis nach der karolingischen Renaissance," *Scholastik: Vierteljahrschrift für Theologie und Philosophie*, 30 (1955), pp. 481–512; Chazelle, "Figure, Character, and the Glorified Body," pp. 15–17; and Kessler, "Christ's Name."

77 Shapiro M., *Romanesque Architectural Sculpture: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures*, ed. Seidel L. (Chicago: 2006) 182–183.

secondary, or emerging out of segments of circles [...] in a way which is inorganic'. He might well have gone further. The geometry that governs the interplay between circular Host and body transformed into circles assimilates the interplay between spirit and flesh in the Incarnation to the Eucharist. As in the First Bible of Charles the Bald, the perfect geometric shape without beginning or end demonstrates that the two bodies, though they seem different to the senses, are fundamentally equal. Geometry also dominates a radically cut-down and reassembled relief in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert [Fig. 1.32],⁷⁸ which like its counterpart in Rodez may formerly have been part of an altar, not only the rhomboid design and circles that frame Christ, but also the garments that enclose him in a series of curves and circles, once studded with inserts. Here, no wafer is offered, only Christ himself, who, however, would have been viewed in relation to actual circular hosts, arranged (presumably) in changing geometric patterns on the mensa.⁷⁹

Simultaneously the provider of hosts and the Host itself in these works, Christ engages the eternal original of the instrument of redemption he offers humankind in a spiritual exchange at the core of Christian belief: Through his own sacrifice on the cross, the Mediator restored humankind to its prelapsarial state.

Intersecting Circles

If the circular disk Eldefonsus saw in his early morning vision is a synecdoche for the channel through which, in Remigius' words, 'He descended so that we might ascend', the double mandorla figures the return from the world of the senses to heaven through Christ's person. The new form of aureole was derived from diagrams of the intersection of fixed and moveable stars as plotted in Calcidius Latin commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, Illustrated in such

78 Saint-Jean R., "Un bas-relief roman: le Christ en gloire de Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert," in *De la création à la restauration. Travaux d'histoire de l'art offerts à Marcel Durlat pour son 75^e anniversaire* (Toulouse: 1992) 245–253; and Kuentz D., "Con otra mirada: Detalles de Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert," *Románico. Revista de arte de amigos del románico* 16 (2013) 4–7. I wish to thank Juan Antonio Olañeta for securing the photograph used in this contribution and David Kuentz for allowing me to reproduce it.

79 The painting by the St. Gilles Master in London (National Gallery) showing a Mass before the golden altar that Charles the Bald had given to St. Denis provides an impression (albeit of a reconstructed state) of the mirroring of *Majestas Domini* and Eucharistic wafer; see Gaborit-Chopin D., *Le trésor de Saint-Denis* [exh. cat., Musée du Louvre] (Paris: 1991) 42–43.



FIGURE 1.32 "Majestas Domini" (ca. 1100). Stone bas-relief. Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert, Musée Lapidaire.

IMAGE COURTESY OF DANIEL KUENTZ.

ninth-century scientific compendiums as those in Valenciennes (Bibliothèque municipale, MS 293, fol. 54^r; Fig. 1.33) and Lyon (Bib. mun., MS 324, fol. 32^v).⁸⁰ A few years before it was applied to Christ in the First Bible of Charles the Bald, the form was introduced *in nuce* in the initial Q of the opening words, *Quod erat ab initio*, in the *First Epistle of John* in the Moutier-Grandval Bible (fol. 406^r) [Fig. 1.34].⁸¹ The interlocking circles, shown there being lowered by the Hand of God, visualize a claim made in the Ps.-Jerome preface (included in the manuscript) that ‘we read the unity of the Trinity in the First Letter of John [...] in which the catholic faith is especially strengthened and the unity of substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is attested’.⁸² A reduction of the argument in Jerome’s genuine tract *De Spiritu Sancto*, the preface (and the initial based on it) use geometry to imagine the Trinity: ‘The same circle of unity and of the substance of the Holy Spirit [...] arising out of that which is the spirit of wisdom and truth, we see dwelling with the Son, and again the Son to be in no way separate from the substance of the Father’.⁸³

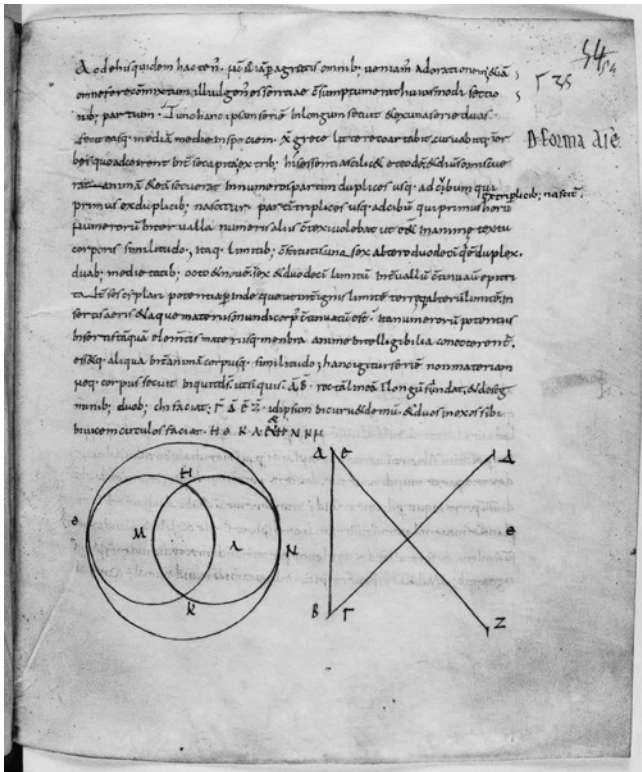
Candidus Wizo, one of Alcuin’s epigones, had been fascinated by the idea underlying Jerome’s text, namely, that the Trinity might be understood as a mathematical progression; and a text attributed to him underscored a claim,

80 *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. J.J. Waszink (London – Leiden: 1975); Dutton P.E., “Material Remains of the Study of the *Timaeus* in the Later Middle Ages,” in Lafleur C. (ed.), *L’enseignement de la philosophie au XIII^e siècle* (Turnhout: 1996) 203–230; Somfai A., “The Nature of Daemons: A Theological Application of the Concept of Geometrical Proportion in Calcidius’ *Commentary* to Plato’s *Timaeus* (40d–41a),” in Sharples R. – Sheppard A. (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to the ‘Timaeus’* (London: 2003) 129–142; Eastwood B. – Graßhoff G., *Planetary Diagrams for Roman Astronomy in Medieval Europe, ca. 800–1500*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 94 (Philadelphia: 2004), esp. part 3; Dronke P., *The Spell of Calcidius: Platonic Concepts and Images in the Medieval West* (Florence: 2008) xviii–xix; Somfai A., “Calcidius’ *Commentary* on Plato’s *Timaeus* and Its Place in the Commentary Tradition: The Concept of *Analogia* in Text and Diagrams,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 47 (2004) 203–220; Calcidius. *Commentaire au Timée de Platon*, ed. – trans. B. Bakhouché, B. (Paris: 2011); and Kessler, “Dynamic Signs”.

81 I discuss this at some length in “Dynamic Signs”.

82 De Bruyne D., *Préfaces de la Bible latine* (Namur: 1920) 255: ‘[...] illo praecipue loco ubi de unitate trinitatis in prima iohannis epistula positum legimus [...]. In quo maxime et fides catholica roboratur et patris et fili et spiritus sancti una divinitatis substantia conprobatur’.

83 *PL* 23.122 (chap. 22): ‘Eumdem circulum unitatis atque substantiae Spiritus sancti [...] rursum Filium a Patris non discrepare substantia’.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque municipale de Valenciennes

FIGURE 1.33 Diagrams (9th century). *Manuscript illumination.*
Valenciennes Bibliothèque municipale, MS 293, fol. 54r.

found in Calcidius as well, that the mean (*medius*) created by two extremes is what allows the cosmos to function:

Is three none other than three ones, and one three? For that reason, it is also a beginning because it is the first perfection, coming from one and two: the first one gives birth; two is the first to be born; and three is the first perfection of that which gives birth and which is born. On that account, one cannot exist alone, since it would not be giving birth unless something were born. But nor can there be just two because the existence of two implies the existence of one and two. Therefore there must be three. However, to make three, one and two must be joined together. And, like love, this joining makes three things of two. Unless they are one, they are not three. [...] See, therefore, that all perfection is a trinity, and indeed this alone; and that everything consists of a beginning, a middle,

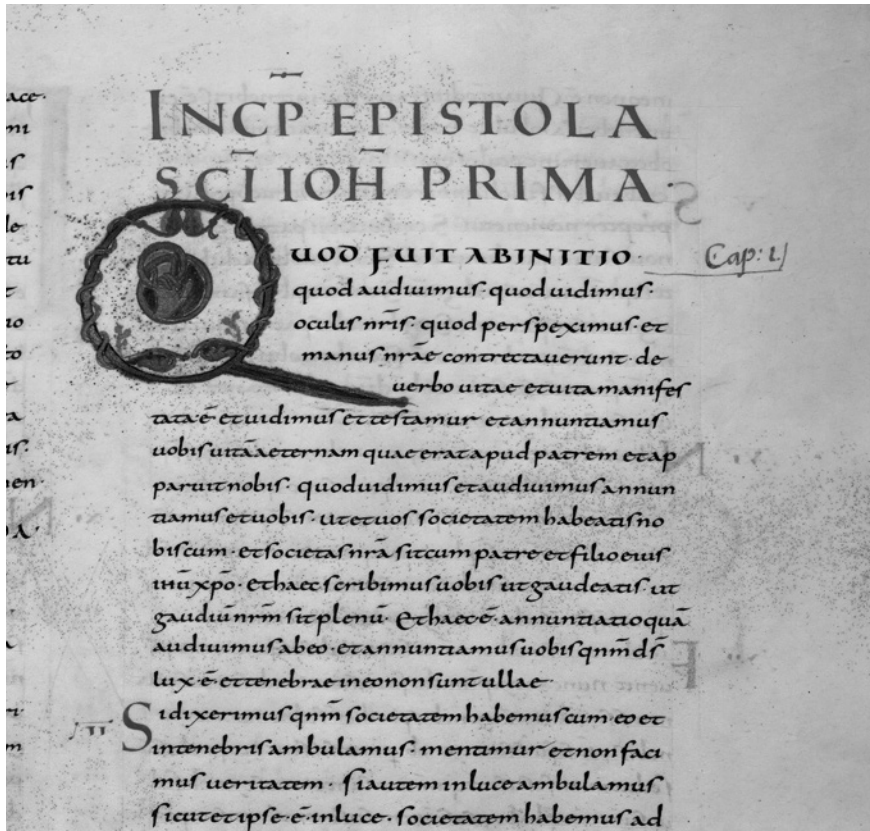


FIGURE 1.34 Initial of First Epistle of John (ca. 840). Manuscript illumination. London, BL MS Add. 10546, fol. 406^r.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD.

and an end. And the beginning cannot exist without the middle and the end; nor the middle without the beginning and the end, nor the end without the beginning and the middle.⁸⁴

84 Marenbon J., *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 1983) 169–170: ‘Tres quid sunt nisi tria unum et unum tria? Et hoc ideo principium quia prima perfectio est ex uno et duobus ueniens: unum primum gignens, duo primo genitus, tres prima perfectio gignetis et geniti. Ideo non solum unum, quia non esset gignens nisi generaret. Ideo non sola duo, quia non aliter fieri potest nisi unum et duo aliquid sint. Sunt ergo tria. Non sunt autem tria nisi iungas unum et duo. Nam unam per se et duo per se non sunt tria; si iungis, tria sunt. Et ipsa eorum iunctio, quasi amor quidam, facit ea duo secum tria esse. Fitque mirabiliter:

Around 800, the Trier Apocalypse (Staatsbibliothek, Cod. 31, fol. 14^r), which may have been made in Tours,⁸⁵ engaged the Mediator's dual nature by showing him seated on the globe throne with his upper body enclosed within an aureole;⁸⁶ and the Weingarten Gospels picked up on the convention, even while introducing such other tropes of incarnation as clouds and the metaphoric pink color. The two intersecting circles—like Eldefonsis' 'rota in rotis'—apply geometrical logic to reinforce the notion of Christ's dual nature; and, forming an implied third field where they overlap, the circles negotiate the unified spirit and substance of the Triune God around a center point in a space of incarnation. The geometry is subordinate to the body of Christ, moreover; in the end, it eludes the simply mechanical and mathematical to express Christ's timelessness and suprageographical status. God, it shows, manifests the invisible geometry of things without being circumscribed by it.

A few years after the Touronian manuscripts were illustrated, John Scotus Eriugena integrated the geometry of the circle and Christ's Incarnation, appropriately in his *Homilies on John's Prologue*:

Contemplate with your inner eyes how in a master the many laws of an art or science are one; how they live in the spirit that disposes them. Contemplate how the infinite number of lines may subsist in a single point, and other similar examples drawn from nature. From the contemplation of such as these, raised above all things by wings of natural contemplation, illuminated and supported by divine grace, you will be able to penetrate by the keenness of your mind the secrets of the Word and, to the extent that it is granted to the human being who seeks signs of God,

si in unum sunt, tria sunt; si tria diusia sunt, non sunt tria. Et, si sic dici queat, si unum sunt, tria sunt; si tres sunt, tria non sunt. Unum enim, cum gignit ipsum quod est, gignit duo. Autem considera quid sint, scilicet duo unum aequalia. Non potest hoc unum plus unum esse quam illud unum. Aequalis ergo potentiae duo unum sunt. Vide ergo quod omnis perfectio trinitas est, immo haec sola: primo, media, fine stare omnia. Et primum non esse sine medio et fine; et medium non esse sine primo et fine, et finem non esse sine primo et medio'. Attributed to Candidus in Morin G., "Un saint de Maestricht rendu à l'histoire", *Revue Benedictine* 8 (1891) 176–83; the passage occurs in a manuscript written in northeastern France at the start of the ninth century (British Library MS Harley 3034).

85 See Laufner R. – Klein P., *Trierer Apokalypse. Vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat des Codex 31 der Stadtbibliothek Trier. Kommentarband* (Trier: 1975).

86 The form became ubiquitous in the Utrecht Psalter, usually dated to ca. 830, but more likely later; see Van der Horst K. – Noel W. – Wüstefeld W.C.M. (eds.), *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art: Picturing the Psalms of David* (Westrenen: 1996); and Chazelle, *Crucified God*.

you will see how all things made by the Word live in the Word and are life. [...] When humanity abandoned God, the light of divine knowledge receded from the world. Since then, the eternal light reveals itself in a twofold manner, through Scripture and through creature.⁸⁷

To such a 'human being who seeks signs of God', the *Majestas Domini* in the ninth-century manuscripts offers a tiny albeit potent point of access at the center, marked by whorls of swirling gold folds that identify Christ's abdomen as the vortex of his human nature and divinity. Sixth-century ampullae, such as one in the Cleveland Museum of Art, already put Christ's umbilicus at the center point of the circular shape;⁸⁸ and Hrabanus Maurus focused on the umbilicus in his *In honorem sanctae crucis*. The *Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam*, once attributed to Hrabanus and now assigned to the twelfth century puts the claim bluntly: 'venter est humanitas Christi'. Gregory the Great had already interpreted the passage from the *Song of Solomon* 5:14 on which this is based, 'His belly as of ivory, set with sapphires,' as a trope—not only of Christ's humanity but also of his dual nature;⁸⁹ and following him, so did Bede:

The belly of the beloved suggests the frailty of his humanity through which he became like us in rank. Ivory indicates the splendor of chastity through which, while in the flesh, he remained free from the corruption of the flesh. Sapphires express the sublimity of the heavenly virtues through which he

87 *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae Homilia super "In principio erat verbum": et Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis*, ed. E. Jeaneau, CCCM 166 (Turnhout: 2008) 20–21: 'Intuere interioribus oculis quomodo multiplices regulae in arte artificis unum sunt et in animo disponentis eas uiuunt, quomodo infinitus linearum numerus in uno puncto unum subsistit, et huiusmodi naturalia perspice exempla. Ex quibus, ueluti physicae theoriae pennis ultra omnia subuectus, diuina gratia adiutus, illuminatus, poteris archana uerbi mentis acie inspicere et, quantum datur humanis argumentationibus deum suum quaerentibus, uidere quomodo omnia quae per uerbum facta sunt in ipso uiuunt et uita sunt: "In ipso enim", ut os loquitur diuinum, "uiuimus et mouemur et sumus". [...] Lux diuinae cognitionis de mundo recessit, dum homo Deum deseruit. Dupliciter ergo lux aeterna se ipsum mundo declarat, per scripturam uidelicet et creaturam'. Also see: Bamford C. (ed.–trans.), *The Voice of the Eagle. The Heart of Celtic Christianity: John Scotus Eriugena's Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John* (Hudson: 1990); Garipzanov, "Metamorphoses"; idem. *Symbolic Language*; and Cavallini A., *Divina scriptura mundus est intelligibilis. Lermeneutica biblica nel pensiero di Giovanni Scoto Eriugena* (Ph.d dissertation, University of Salerno, 2011).

88 Reudenbach B., "Reliquien von Orten. Ein frühchristliches Reliquiar als Gedächtnisort", in Reudenbach B. – Toussaint G. (eds.), *Reliquiare im Mittelalter* (Hamburg: 2005) 21–41.

89 *PL* 79:524: *Expositio super Cantica Cantecorum*, chap. 5.

shone while in the flesh. [...] Christ's belly is of ivory and set with sapphires because his immaculate and undefiled incarnation repeatedly shone forth with the wonders of his divine majesty.⁹⁰

Framed by the intersecting Calcidian circles and animated by the gold folds, Christ's abdomen engages his dual nature in the *Majestas Domini* of the First Bible of Charles the Bald, and also in the simpler renderings of the Dufay and Lothar Gospels and later manuscripts made for Charles the Bald, for example, the San Paolo Bible in Rome,⁹¹ Metz Sacramentary, and Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram (Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14000, fol. 6^r).⁹² Moreover, the imagery became widespread. It is clearest on the Trinity page in the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold, where the O of *Omnipotens* that serves also as the mandorla for the incarnate Deity is centered in the very middle of the abdomen, highlighted and marked by the compass point that mediates between letter, sign of divinity, and body, that is, between Christ's human and spiritual natures.⁹³ And the same interplay of *medietas* and mediator was applied quite literally on the late tenth-century *Majestas* in Koblenz (Landeshauptarchiv, Ms. 701/81, fol. 127^r),⁹⁴ which so emphasizes Christ's belly that the Lord appears actually to be pregnant [Fig. 1.35]. The same is true also on the Rodez relief and more clearly still on the Saint-Guilhem relief, on which Christ's abdomen was once adorned with incrustations in a realization of the exegetic tradition on trope from the *Song of Solomon*. In these, the notion of incarnation is made both literal and transactional.⁹⁵

90 *In cantica canticorum allegorica expositio*, ed. D. Hurst D., CCSL 119B (Turnhout: 1983), Bk. 5, 336: 'Venter ergo dilecti, fragilitatem humanitatis ejus, qua nobis conformis erat, insinuat. Ebur decorem castitatis, qua a corruptione peccati carnis immunis in carne permansit, indicat. Sapphiri, sublimitatem virtutum coelestium, quibus in carne fulgebat, exprimunt. [...] Distinctus est ergo sapphirus venter Christi eburneus, quia immaculata et incontaminabilis ejus incarnatio, frequentibus refulsit miraculis divinae celsitudinis'. Also see Holder A. (trans.), *The Venerable Bede: On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: 2011) 165–166. Cf. Haimo of Auxerre, *Commentarium in Cantica Canticorum*, chap. 5 (PL 117:334).

91 Gaehde, "Decorazione" 166.

92 Köhler et al., *Kar. Min.*, 5, 175–98; and *Iohannis Scotti Erivgenae Carmina*, 130–131.

93 See the discussion of incarnational imagery in Deshman, *Benedictional*.

94 Kühnel, *End of Time* 238; Euw A. von (ed.), *Vor dem Jahr 1000: Abendländische Buchkunst zur Zeit der Kaiserin Theophanu* (Cologne, 1991), cat. no. 40.

95 See also the twelfth-century modelbook in Einsiedeln (Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 12, fol. 4^v); and Scheller R., *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages* (ca. 900–ca. 1450) (Amsterdam: 1995) 118–122.



FIGURE 1.35 *Majestas Domini* (last quarter, 10th century). Manuscript illumination. Koblenz, Landeshauptarchiv, Ms. 701/81, fol. 127^r.

By figuring Christ as the ‘medietas’ that generates all of scripture, all of nature, and all forms, the pictures themselves thus enable Christ’s mediation on behalf of humankind, which cannot see God because Adam and Eve sinned at the beginning but who can still hope for redemption at the end of time. Like the incarnate God they represent and the Host they show him offering, the material images are sacred instruments of the mediator for humans who fully accept the implications of Christ’s Incarnation.

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Mute Mysteries of the Divine Logos: On the Pictorial Poetics of Incarnation

Klaus Krüger

In the following I will focus mostly on one painting, which seems to me especially relevant and illuminating in our context, namely the *Virgo Annunziata* or *Virgin Annunciate*, painted by Antonello da Messina in ca. 1475–1476 [Fig. 2.1]. As a preliminary remark, let me note however that this painting with its striking aesthetic structure and its impact on the beholder is only one example of a more general historical development of pictorial aesthetics, respectively pictorial poetics. The synthesis of heterogeneous, counterfactual realities in the medium of pictorial fiction, and the aesthetic creation of a visual paradox, namely an ‘eternal moment’, an ‘impalpable presence’, a ‘narrative icon’ etc., are generally characteristic of the special quality and novelty of the representational forms that had dominated northern Italian painting of Veneto and Lombardy, especially since the late Quattrocento.¹ What we find here is the fundamental desire to integrate the paradoxical character of the image, its ‘mode of being’ as both opaque medium and transparent membrane, into a comprehensive poetics of representation, a new pictorial articulation. The consequences are twofold. First, the pictorial reference to the viewer acquires a new character as he is actually ‘addressed’ and communicatively included by the painting in an increasingly direct way. Second, the image acquires a new capacity for poetic expression. There is a growing ability to articulate

* This article goes back to arguments and interpretations undertaken in my book *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien* (Munich 2001). A comprehensive and critical synopsis of the book, including a discussion of the notion of the term ‘mediality’, which is unusual in English, but central in the book, is to be found in the review by Falkenburg R. *The Art Bulletin* 89 (2007) 593–597.

1 See the fundamental study, Ringbom S., *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, *Acta Academiae Aboensis* 31 (1965). See also Huse N., *Studien zu Giovanni Bellini* (Munich: 1972), esp. 42f; Rosand D., “Giorgione e il concetto della creazione artistica”, in *Giorgione*, *Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio*, Castelfranco Veneto 1978 (Asolo: 1979) 135–139; Belting H., *Giovanni Bellini Pietà : Ikone und Bilderzählung in der venezianischen Malerei* (Frankfurt am Main: 1985); and Shearman J., *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: 1992) 33f, 109f.



FIGURE 2.1 *Antonello da Messina, Virgin Annunciate (ca. 1475–76). Oil on wood, 45 × 34.5 cm. Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia.*

IMAGE © BPK | SCALA.

pictorial content by non-discursive, non-linguistic means and thereby to generate semantically condensed and intensified messages.

All this is on full display in Antonello da Messina's famous panel of the *Virgin Annunciate*, which he painted during his stay in Venice ca. 1475–1476.² The image presents the Virgin in a tranquil, clearly structured composition. The strict symmetry and frontality are reminiscent of an icon. Only the implied movement of the right hand, which reaches forward into the pictorial

² 45 × 34.5 cm. Mandel G., *L'opera completa di Antonello da Messina*, Classici dell'arte, 10 (Milan: 1967) 99, no. 65; Morabattini A. – Sricchia Santoro F. (eds.), *Antonello da Messina*, exh. cat. (Rome: 1981) 184f, no. 41; and Sricchia Santoro F., *Antonello e l'Europa* (Milan: 1986) 168, no. 39; and Savettieri C., *Antonello da Messina* (Palermo: 1998) 70f, no. 5.

space, and the direction of the Virgin's gaze, which almost imperceptibly follows the turning of her body, subtly indicate that a scenic incident, namely the Annunciation, is taking place. Antonello radically reduces the event of the Annunciation by depicting only the very moment in which the Virgin receives the Word of God, and with it the divine fruit of her womb. The actual descent of the divine Logos remains imperceptible to the eyes. It can only be inferred from Mary's reaction and from the reflection of the light that shines on her from above, and which appears to radiate all the more intensely against the dark background.³ The actual subject of the image is thus the paradoxical manifestation of the invisible in the visible, of light amidst darkness, of the Word in the flesh, in sum: of the divine in the temporal. The synthesis of icon (*imago*) and history painting (*historia*) produces the visual impression of an eternal moment that allows contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation itself.

Antonello's image links 'the problem of visibility with a new conception of the image, which he defines in a radically new way', since the image's meaning is now completed only in its aesthetic perception and thus only in the viewer's productive imagination.⁴ The latter is continually kept active by the mysterious indeterminacy that pervades the whole image. This indeterminacy stems not only from the basic design of an 'implied action', with its oscillation between descriptive and narrative image (*Zustandsbild* and *Ereignisbild*), but also, and especially, from the subtle elaboration of the painted figure and its expression. The Virgin appears reclusive and withdrawn, enclosed in the compact, tent-like cover of her cloak, which she holds in front of her chest with her left hand.⁵ Nevertheless her whole attention is focused on what is happening to her, which she acknowledges by extending her right hand. The harmonious proportions of her face stem from a traditional typological canon, but nonetheless betray a powerful psychological depth reminiscent of the individualized traits of a portrait. Her expression is calm yet deeply moved, youthful yet profoundly mature. The hint of a smile seems to play upon her lips while at

3 Regarding the symbolism of light in the context of the iconography of the Annunciation see Meiss M. "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings", *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945) 175–181.

4 Belting H., *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: 1994) 346.

5 This is a reference to the Immaculate Conception and the notion that Mary is the tabernacle of the Lord; for the metaphor of the closed tent as a topos that refers to Mary's imminent confinement, see Os H.W. van, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei 1300–1450* (The Hague: 1969) 141; and Salzer A., *Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Linz: 1893) 18f.

the same time suggesting composed seriousness. In keeping with the Gospel's account, which relates her anxiety ('she was greatly troubled at the saying') as well as her compliance ('Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word'),⁶ the gesture of her right hand indicates both her resistance and her fear, but also calm consent.⁷ The thematically determined ambivalence just discussed is thus woven into the visible characteristics of the central figure, so much so that her appearance itself wears the signature of the indeterminate, the inexplicable and the ineffable.

The positioning of the lectern also contributes to the suspense-filled sense of ambiguity that characterizes the overall pictorial effect. Positioned at an angle, it creates a spatial effect that confronts the viewer with its emphatic presence, while keeping him at a distance like a barrier. The lectern thus reinforces both proximity and remoteness as the two poles between which the viewer's perception unfolds. In a word, the mysteriousness of the Virgin becomes the enigma of the image itself, in which the higher mystery of God's Incarnation is contracted into an aesthetic experience.

Antonello's *Annunciation* makes clear just what it means to speak of painting's new 'articulacy' and its repercussions. The subject of Antonello's painting is a spoken dialogue between the Virgin and the angel Gabriel, as narrated in *Luke* 1:28–38 and illustrated by an iconographic tradition spanning a great number of paintings, continued into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond [Fig. 2.2]. The idea that the encounter between the Virgin and the angel took the form of a dialogue had a long tradition. This is suggested not only by the widespread practice of elaborating the exchange between the two in Marian sermons and in other forms of spiritual literature. It is also testified to by the daily prayer of lay persons, which from the thirteenth century on was the *Ave Maria* with its persistent repetition of the words in question.⁸ This conception of the Annunciation was often portrayed in painting by staging the dialogue with the help of inscriptions that render the exact words spoken by the two protagonists according to the Bible. Seeming to emerge directly out of their opened mouths, the inscriptions lend visual form to their spoken

6 *Luke* 1:29: 'turbata est in sermone eius'; and *Luke* 1:38: 'ecce ancilla domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum'.

7 Lauts J., "Antonello da Messina", *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* N.F. 7 (1933) 15–88, esp. 43.

8 Gössmann E., *Die Verkündigung an Maria im dogmatischen Verständnis des Mittelalters* (Munich: 1957) 217f; and Büttner F.O., *Imitatio pietatis. Motive der christlichen Ikonographie als Modelle zur Verähnlichung* (Berlin: 1983) 70f.



FIGURE 2.2 *Matthias Stomer, Annunciation (ca. 1630–32). Oil on canvas, 117 × 171,5 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.*

IMAGE ©KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM WIEN MIT MVK UND OETM.

interaction [Fig. 2.3].⁹ The notion of a visible verbal exchange, to which images of the Annunciation in particular bear witness, possessed a topical meaning from an early date. Already in the twelfth century, the Byzantine poet Theodoros Prodromos describes an Annunciation by the painter Eulalios which was executed with such skill that, as he puts it, one could almost hear Gabriel and Mary speak.¹⁰ At a later date, Dante, in a much quoted passage from the *Purgatorio*, has his traveler praise the liveliness and the veritable eloquence of a marble relief depicting the Annunciation: “The angel who came to

9 Wenzel H., “Die Verkündigung an Maria: Zur Visualisierung des Wortes in der Szene, oder: Schriftgeschichte im Bild”, in Opitz C. et al. (eds.), *Maria in der Welt. Marienverehrung im Kontext der Sozialgeschichte 10.-18. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: 1993) 23–52; and Tarr R., “‘Visibile parlare’: The Spoken Word in Fourteenth-Century Central Italian Painting”, *Word and Image* 3 (1997) 223–244. See also Marin L., “Annonciations toscanes”, in idem, *Opacité de la peinture: Essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento* (Paris: 1989) 125–163, the author refers to the angel of the Annunciation as ‘énoncé figuré de l’énonciation’, 162.

10 Maguire H., *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton: 1981) 11f; and Belting, *Likeness and Presence* 273f.



FIGURE 2.3 *Simone Martini, Annunciation, detail with the Angel Gabriel saying 'Ave' (1333). Tempera and gold on wood, 184 × 210 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.*

IMAGE © BPK | SCALA.

earth with the decree of peace [...] before us there appeared so vividly graven [...] that it seemed not a silent image: one would have sworn he was saying, "Ave" ("L'angel che venne in terra col decreto [...] dinanzi a noi pareva sí verace [...], che non sembiava imagine che tace. Giurato si saría ch'el dicesse "Ave!"; *Purg.* x, 34–40).¹¹

The special emphasis placed on the spoken word in the context of the Annunciation is of course theologically founded. This emphasis can be explained by the traditional doctrine that interpreted the process of Incarnation as a spiritually induced conception. How this took place (*modus incarnationis*) is represented in the extraordinary idea of the conception of Jesus through Mary's ear, described as follows by Bernard of Clairvaux:

¹¹ *Purgatorio* x, 34–40, in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, trans. C.S. Singleton (Princeton: 1977) II, 101. Concerning this, see the very recent publication Kablitz A., "Jenseitige Kunst oder Gott als Bildhauer: Die Reliefs in Dantes Purgatorio (*Purg.* x–xii)", in Kablitz A. – Neumann G. (eds.), *Mimesis und Simulation* (Freiburg i.Br.: 1998) 309–356, esp. 325f.

'The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to convey the word of the father (*Verbum Patris*) through her ear (*per aurem*) into the spirit and the womb of the Virgin'.¹² The physiologically rather peculiar metaphor of God speaking through the angel and of his Logos entering through the ear of the Virgin has its roots in the basic but paradoxical notion 'that the divine word, when it is heard and accepted, has the power of life-giving seed'.¹³

This theological background explains the specific challenge faced by representations of the Annunciation. On the one hand, they aim to give visual form to the divine word and are therefore confronted with the fundamental problem of the difference between the medium of language and that of images. On the other hand, they must find an appropriate way of depicting the intrinsic paradox that is characteristic of the notion of the 'divine Word'. The heavenly Logos, as the all-powerful Word of the Creator, forms a unity with God: according to the opening of John's Gospel (*John* 1:1), 'Deus erat verbum', 'the Word was God'; the Logos remains forever beyond man's comprehension and categorically inaccessible to human language (*ineffabile*). In the Incarnation, however, mankind receives the Logos in its revealed form, as the miraculous gift of God's son.¹⁴ As Bernardino da Siena argues in a sermon delivered in Florence around 1425, the mystery of the Incarnation (*mysterium incarnationis*) implies that what cannot be represented (*infigurabile*) infuses the image in the way that the ineffable (*ineffabile*) enters language; and that just as the invisible pervades what is visible, so too the inaudible reverberates in what is heard.¹⁵ Attempts to provide visual representations of so complex a set of exegetical ideas occasionally produced curious solutions, especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Long, contorted mouthpieces that lead directly from the mouth of God the Father down to Mary's ear [Fig. 2.4], or tiny figures of the Christ

12 "Sermo", *Sanctus Bernardus, Opera*, eds. J. Leclercq – C.H. Talbot – H.M. Rochais, 6 vols. (Rome: 1957–1972) V 165–170, quotation 167. In general, see Martin J., "Exkurs: Die Empfängnis durch das Ohr", *Würzburger Jahrbücher für Altertumswissenschaft* 1 (1946) 390–399; Guldán E., "'Et verbum caro factum est': Die Darstellung der Inkarnation Christi im Verkündigungsbild", *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 63 (1968) 145–169, esp. 155f.; Steinberg L., "'How Shall This Be?' Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation in London, Part 1", *Artibus et historiae* 16 (1987) 25–44, esp. 26f; and Schreiner K., *Maria. Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin* (Munich: 1994) 40f.

13 Ibidem 40.

14 See Schnackenburg R. – Huber C., "Logos. II (In der Schrift), III (Dogmengeschichte)", *LThK* 6 (1961), cols. 1122–1128; Bühner J.-A., "Logos im Alten und Neuen Testament", *HistWbPh* 5 (1980), cols. 499–502; and Gilson E., "L 'esse' du Verbe incarnée selon saint Thomas d'Aquin", in idem, *Autour de Saint Thomas* (Paris: 1986) 81–95.

15 See Marin, "Annonciations toscanes" 136.

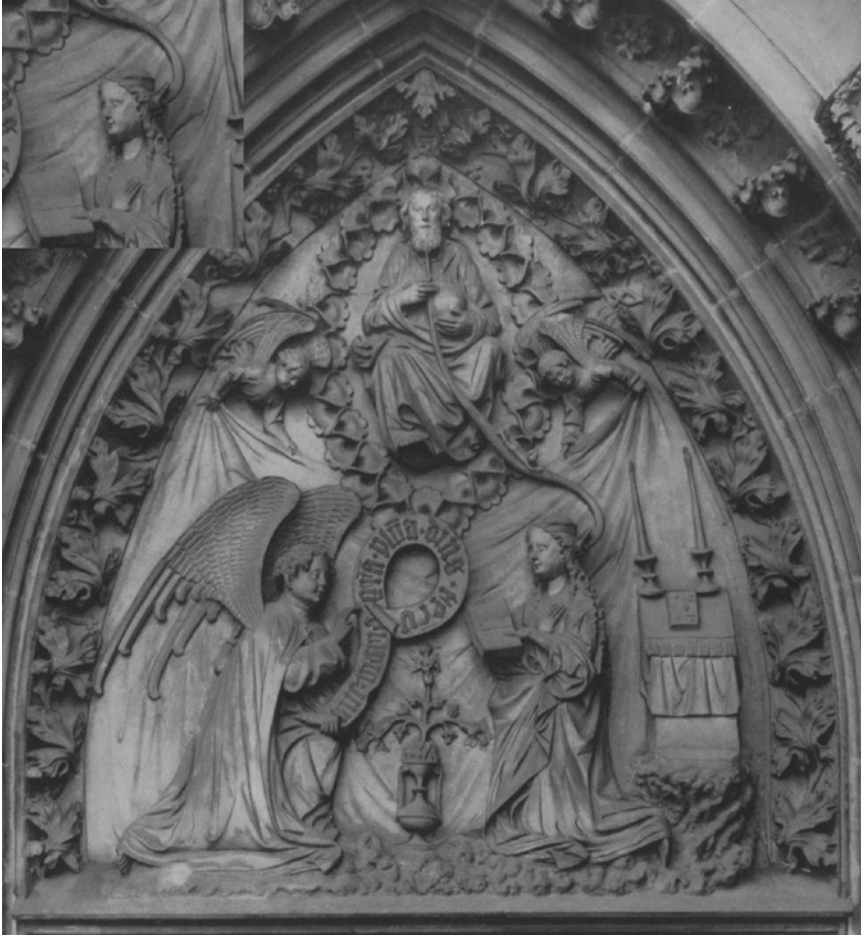


FIGURE 2.4 *Unknown master, Annunciation through the Ear (ca. 1400). Stone carving. Würzburg, Chapel of Mary, northern portal.*
IMAGE © AUTHOR.

Child as a homunculus flying down from God's mouth into Virgin's ear, constitute pictorial ideas that were open to misunderstanding and as a result were quickly condemned theologically.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Guldán, "‘Et verbum caro factum est’: Die Darstellung der Inkarnation Christi" 155f; and Steinberg, "‘How Shall This Be?’ Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation". For an overview regarding representations of the Annunciation in the Quattrocento and the ways in which they engage with conceptual problems in theology see the most recent publication on the topic, see Arasse D., *L'Annonciation italienne: Une histoire de perspective* (Paris: 1999).

If we return to Antonello's *Virgin Annunciate* [Fig. 2.1], it becomes apparent how well this painter compressed the issues raised by the subject matter into one visual representation. Central to the painting is the strict reduction of the scene and its quasi reworking into a portrait of the Virgin at the very moment of the Annunciation. The angel, as the vehicle of the spoken Word of God, is no longer visible. His presence can only be inferred from the reaction and expression of the Virgin as she conceives her child. This is how the painting visually represents the Logos, which is spoken and yet cannot be heard; and this is how it represents the Word's Incarnation, which is material but nonetheless cannot be seen. The painting thus visualizes the paradoxical enigma known as the 'Incarnation of the Logos', of which human experience can only partake through the mystery of faith. But the compelling intensity that the painting achieves is due above all to the consistency with which it marks its subject as an aesthetically reflected illusion. The viewer becomes aware of the paradox inherent in the subject matter only through the experience of the paradox inherent in the medial character of the image—namely its capacity to elicit the invisible by means of a visual, deceptively real-looking presence and to evoke the ineffable through its mute but articulate expression as an image.

Antonello's painting develops what one might call a mute discourse by staging the angel's address without actually representing it. The angel's words are implicit in the dialogic exchange between the Virgin and, now, the viewer himself as her new interlocutor. This dialogue, however, cannot be realized as an actual conversation but only in and through an intense empathy sustained by the power of vision. The underlying idea that the believer should follow the exemplary role of the angel of the Annunciation is by no means uncommon. The thirteenth-century *Mariale aureum* states, 'Let us take as our example the angel who greeted her [Mary] with reverence', ('Habemus exemplum ab angelo, qui eam reverenter salutavit'), and devotional practice from the late Middle Ages onward supplies numerous examples of similar adaptations of religious roles.¹⁷ The striving for this sort of intimate proximity to the Virgin at the moment of conception expresses a yearning for the salvation promised by the mystery of the Incarnation. Similar images portraying pious nuns and monks, priests and lay donors taking the angel's place or being encouraged to imitate him were common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries [Fig. 2.5]. In Fra Angelico's famous fresco of the Annunciation in San Marco in Florence, which today greets the visitor at the landing of the stairs leading up to the monks' cells [Fig. 2.6], there is an inscription which admonishes everyone passing by

17 In this context see Büttner, *Imago pietatis* 70f, with numerous references.



FIGURE 2.5 *Sandro Botticelli (workshop), Annunciation (ca. 1495). Tempera on wood, 36,5 × 35 cm. Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum.*
IMAGE © LANDESMUSEUM HANNOVER.



FIGURE 2.6 *Fra Angelico, Annunciation (ca. 1442–43). Fresco, 230 × 321 cm. Florence, Convent of San Marco.*
IMAGE © BPK | SCALA.

not to fail in joining the angel and greeting Mary with an *Ave*.¹⁸ The fresco aspires to achieve by way of an explicit address what Antonello's painting achieves implicitly by way of visual evocation: namely, the incorporation of the viewer into the scene, as both addressee and participant.

The new, innovative conception of the 'nature of the image' manifested in Antonello's *Virgin Annunciate* could be further illuminated by conducting a comparative study of its immediate iconographic predecessors. These include a slightly earlier version by Antonello himself, which was painted in 1474 and which is now located in Munich [Fig. 2.7].¹⁹ Despite its captivating *trompe l'oeil* effect of the parapet with two books, the earlier work does not achieve the same spatial depth, or the same acuteness in the capturing of a fleeting moment, or a similarly concise pictorial construction. Moreover, the motif of Mary crossing her hands before her chest in a gesture of *humiliatio* remains within the bounds of an established convention. A Florentine panel of the late Trecento (ca. 1385–1390), today attributed to Niccolò di Pietro Gerini [Fig. 2.8], proves that the version in Munich is much more traditional in character than the one in Palermo.²⁰ Both in its inclusion of the traditional gesture of humility and in its emphasis on the motif of the book, the Florentine panel represents the traditional type on which Antonello's pictorial invention is based. According to a well-documented complex of metaphorical imagery, the motif of the 'sealed book' (*liber signatus*) refers both to the unfathomable counsel of the Lord and to Mary's virginal conception. Finally, open or closed, it also refers to Jesus as the 'book of life' on which believers, just like the Virgin herself, can draw as a source of knowledge about their salvation.²¹

A comparison of Antonello's two Annunciations with Gerini's Florentine panel brings to light a tradition that can be traced back beyond Gerini's work and into the thirteenth century.²² At the same time, however, such a comparison also brings out the extent to which Antonello departs from this

18 Pope-Hennessy J., *Fra Angelico*, 2nd edition (London: 1974) 206: 'Virginis intacte cum veneris ante figuram pretereundo cave ne sileatur ave [...]'.
 19 42.5 × 32.8 cm. See Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative* 65; Mandel, *L'opera completa di Antonello da Messina* 94, no. 40; Kultzen R., *Italienische Malerei, Alte Pinakothek München, Katalog v* (Munich: 1975) 13f; *Antonello da Messina*, exh. cat. (1981) 148f, no. 31; Sricchia Santoro, *Antonello e l'Europa* 161f, no. 24; Belting, *Likeness and Presence* 346f; and Savettieri, *Antonello da Messina* 69f, no. 4.

20 Syre C., *Frühe italienische Gemälde aus dem Bestand der Alten Pinakothek*, exh. cat. (Munich: 1990) 52f, no. 4.

21 For this context with references see Schreiner, *Maria* 149f.

22 See Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative* 64f; Belting, *Likeness and Presence* 346f (on the icon of the 'Maria Annunciate' in the Cathedral of Fermo, late 13th cent.); and Syre, *Frühe italienische Gemälde* 54f.



FIGURE 2.7 *Antonello da Messina, Virgin Annunciate (ca. 1474). Oil on wood, 43 cm × 32 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.*

IMAGE © ALTE PINAKOTHEK / BAYERISCHE
STAATSGEMÄLDESAMMLUNGEN.

tradition by charging the icon with narrative content and indeed fictionalizing it. Antonello's abandonment of a direct confrontation with the Virgin's gaze is especially remarkable. Apparently in deliberate contrast with Antonello's actual portraits, the scene shows Mary looking from the side at an unspecified point outside the painting. The figure thereby becomes animated with a certain tension that accords with the subject matter but seems equally to be motivated by Mary's inner state.²³ In this way, the figure acquires great credibility and immediacy. At the same time, through the intentness with which she

23 Regarding the interplay of gazes in other religious motifs by Antonello, see the most recent publication on the topic Thiébaud D., *Le Christ à la Colonne d'Antonello de Messine*, Les dossiers du musée du Louvre (Paris: 1993). On the portraits see *ibidem*, esp. 93f; Savettieri,

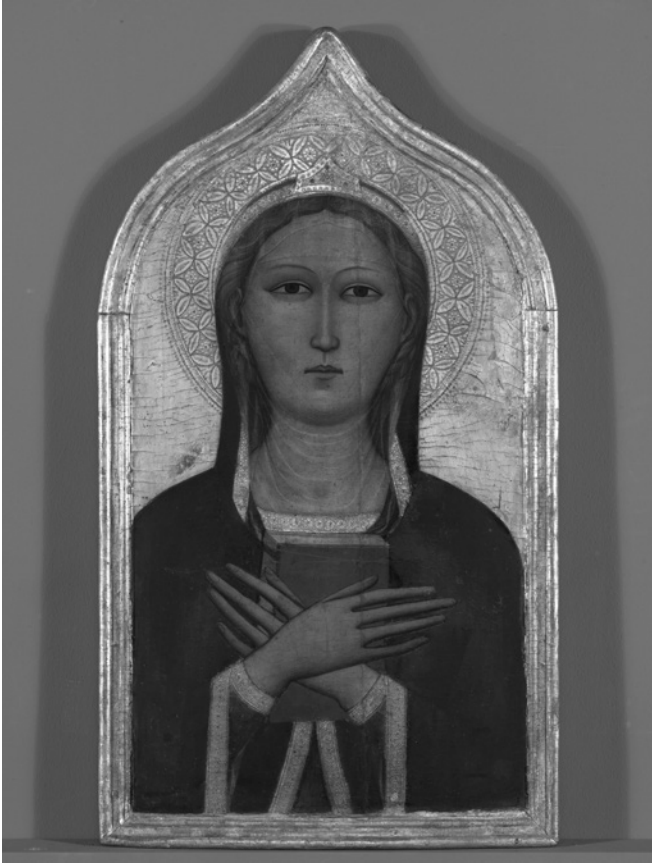


FIGURE 2.8 *Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, Virgin Annunciate (ca. 1385–1390).
Tempera on wood, 80 × 45 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.
IMAGE © ALTE PINAKOTHEK / BAYERISCHE
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concentrates on the event at hand, she remains remote from the beholder. In a word: what we look at is a subtle fictionalization of the icon, creating a specific combination of proximity and distance that may be regarded as a fundamental characteristic of aesthetic illusion.

Both Antonello's Annunciations probably originated during his stay in Venice, where they were most likely produced as devotional images for pri-

Antonello da Messina 118f; and Boehm G., *Bildnis und Individuum: Über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der italienischen Renaissance* (Munich: 1985) 147f.

vate patrons seeking support in matters such as pregnancy and childbirth.²⁴ The two paintings are original and path-setting inventions, whose popularity and success are documented by numerous and widespread copies and adaptations.²⁵ The creators of these copies did not always equal Antonello's compact form of representation or live up to the original's aesthetic ambition. This is most evident in copies that expand on the original by adding the Christ Child and thereby render visible and explicit what Antonello's depiction left subtly implicit.²⁶

Apart from such direct emulation of Antonello's Annunciations, one could, in a wider context, trace the continuing impact and elaboration of this highly reflective approach to the image, with its resulting evocative involvement of the beholder. It is primarily Leonardo's various pictorial inventions that come to mind here. Among them, special consideration (in our context) is owed to his depiction of the angel of the Annunciation who confronts the viewer rather than Mary with the heavenly message [Fig. 2.9]. This painting, presumably created around 1510, is known only from Vasari's description and through extrapolation from various copies and a drawing from Leonardo's workshop.²⁷ The painting's unusual design inverts, so to speak, Antonello's arrangement and visual display of the Incarnation, and may derive from a different

24 For Mary as the special patron of pregnant women, see Schreiner, *Maria* 57f.

25 The early replicas are enumerated in Mandel (1967) 94 and 100, also in Zeri F., "Un riflesso di Antonello da Messina a Firenze", *Paragone* 99 (1958) 16–21. This pictorial concept was effective until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; for an example, see images of the "Vergine annunziata" by Flaminio Torre, c. 1650, in Rome, Galleria Pallavicini and in a private collection in Bologna, Ambrosini Massari A.M., in Negro E. – Pirondini M. (eds.), *La Scuola di Guido Reni* (Modena: 1992) 393; and Manni G. – Negro E. – Pirondini M. (eds.), *Arte emiliana dalle raccolte storiche al nuovo collezionismo* (Modena: 1989) 118.

26 Examples in Zeri (1958).

27 Vasari G., *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori, con nuove annotazioni e commenti di G. Milanesi*, 9 vols. (Florence: 1906), vol. 4, 26: '[...] nel palazzo del duca Cosimo [...] una testa d'uno angelo, che alza un braccio in aria, che scorta dalla spalla al gomito venendo innanzi, e l'altro ne va al petto con una mano [...]']. Among the replicas special mention deserve those in those in Basel (Kunstmuseum), Oxford (Ashmolean Museum) [Fig. 2.9] and St. Petersburg (Hermitage); and the drawing (ca. 1504/05) in Windsor, Royal Library, n. 12328r; on this topic see Clark K., *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, 2nd edition (London: 1968–1969) 1 27f). In general see Möller E., "Leonardo da Vincis Brustbild eines Engels und seine Komposition des S. Johannes-Baptista", *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 3 (1911) 529–539; Pedretti C., *Leonardo. A Study in Chronology and Style* (New York-London: 1982) 167, 169f; Marani, *Leonardo. Catalogo completo dei dipinti* 58; Kemp M., *Leonardo e lo spazio dello scultore*, *Lettura vinciana*, 27 (Florence: 1988) 20f; Marani P.C., *Leonardo. Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence: 1989) 145f, no. 12 A; and Shearman, *Only Connect* 33f.



FIGURE 2.9 *Unknown artist after Leonardo da Vinci, Angel of the Annunciation (ca. 1510–1520). Oil on wood, 75 × 53.4 cm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.*

IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

iconographic intention, namely that of Leonardo's portrayal of Saint John the Baptist in the Louvre [Fig. 2.10]. However this may be, the emphatic pointing gesture of Leonardo's angel, combined with the auspicious tenderness in his posture, may well be interpreted as a visualization of the divine appeal to understand the essentially invisible scenario and its promise of salvation. Significantly, in his description of Leonardo's image of the angelic messenger, Vasari particularly praised the striking effect of the figure's emerging with sculptural force (*maggiore rilievo*) from the unfathomable darkness into the light and into the space of the viewer.²⁸ Indeed, the dynamic torsion makes the angel appear to step out from the impenetrable darkness and into the light that illuminates him from an external source. The figure appears right at the

²⁸ Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. 4, 26.



FIGURE 2.10 *Leonardo da Vinci, St. John the Baptist (ca. 1513–1516). Oil on wood, 69 × 57 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.*

IMAGE © BPK | RMN—GRAND PALAIS |
STÉPHANE MARÉCHALLE.

threshold between image and reality, a line of transition that serves at the same time as a line between mundane experience, temporally and spatially structured, and the complete absence of that structure in the dark, undefined background. The angel oscillates between both zones. Correspondingly, his appearance strikes the viewer as palpably real, yet at the same time seems atmospherically interlaced with the unfathomable darkness. This alone suffices to demonstrate that the image is designed to depict more than just the objective appearance of the motif of the angel (who, by the way, as a spiritual being has no objective reality at all). It seeks to express, in a visually compressed form, the cognitive difference between this world and the next, between the here and now and the beyond. The rotational movement of the whole figure, ending in the upward pointing gesture, is directed at transcending both itself and the

painting, toward a realm that the image can intimate but not represent. Through its staging of light and its shaping of the motif, the image as a painted medium adopts the difference between the visible and the invisible as its proper theme. It has the paradoxical aim of representing what cannot be represented.

In parenthesis, it should also be mentioned that a variation of Leonardo's invention is found in a depiction of the archangel Gabriel kept in Chantilly (Musée Condé) and attributed to Annibale Carracci, which contains a similar motif [Fig. 2.11].²⁹ Carracci's painting shows the winged messenger



FIGURE 2.11 *Annibale Carracci (attr.), Angel of the Annunciation (late 16th cent.). Oil on canvas, 249 × 212 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé.*

IMAGE © BPK | RMN—GRAND PALAIS | RENÉ-GABRIEL
OJÉDA | FRANCK RAUX.

29 *Der Glanz der Farnese: Kunst und Sammelleidenschaft in der Renaissance*, exh. cat. (Milan – Munich: 1995) 99.

gliding down from ethereal, angelic heights and looking straight at the viewer, even though the white lily in his hand is an unmistakable indication that his message is intended for the Virgin Mary. The painting, however, facing the observer so directly and so visibly with an invisible and unfathomable message, becomes a paradox, namely that of being faced directly with the message of salvation, even though this message is destined only indirectly for him. This paradox is subtly enhanced by the novel motif of angelic music, jubilantly intoned as a heavenly sound and *maestoso* resonance of the Incarnation. Heavenly music (*musica coelestis*), however, is defined in theological terms quite clearly as inaudible, voiced and played by spiritual beings. Nevertheless, this inaudible *musica coelestis* of salvation is visualized as a performance given by angels who sing and even play physically real musical instruments, and is hence visibly translated into the category of mundane audibility. At the same time, and in light of the categorical muteness of the medium of painting, it is precisely the visual and motivically implied audibility of this *musica coelestis* that is refused any audible, acoustic expression. Hence, the pictorial poetics of incarnation is amplified and widened here via an intermedial discourse connecting the unfathomable mystery with the aporia of an invisible audibility, and correspondingly, with the visualization of the inaudible.

The basic premises underlying such a painting's claim to convey religious content underwent far-reaching changes from the Renaissance onward. Given the steady increase in the elaboration of mimetic possibilities, novel conceptions of the image arose, founded on new claims about the hermeneutic openness of the representational relation. Depending on one's outlook and ideological propensity, this shift in representation can be understood either as the symptom of a crisis or as part of a process of emancipation. Especially since the Cinquecento, the question of the ontological status of images—alongside the question of who was competent to produce and to interpret them—generated a new diversity and differentiation of arguments as well as an unprecedented degree of polemical vehemence. Naturally, this discussion was not confined to theoretical discourse, but also affected the everyday production and reception of images, in such a way that the pictorial solutions that emerged are always, at least in part, to be understood as complex ways of reflecting on and adapting, productively applying or critically revising, already existing paintings and pictorial conceptions. This reflective dimension plays a crucial part in constituting the image's meaning and always contains a more or less explicit comment on the image's status qua image. This is true especially in those instances where a specific item within the painting is singled out to refer beyond the

painting, be it through the adaptation of particular models or codes, or in the literal form of a 'represented representation', i.e., of an image within the image. These are ways of 'framing' an image, of semantically situating or contextualizing it within the coordinates of its assigned function. In short, the 'framing' itself creates a new visual poetics to express the paradox of the Incarnation.

Let us take as an example some paintings that perform the discontinuity between different levels of reality in a literal sense, by way of an image within the image. One example is Sebastiano Carello's painting in Savigliano from about 1645, showing Catherine of Siena and John the Baptist devoutly attending to a painting of the Annunciation [Fig. 2.12].³⁰ Another example is a work in Parma painted by Giovanni Venanzi in 1667 [Fig. 2.13]. It employs a similar pictorial form, displaying Saints Nicholas and Barbara before a painting of the Annunciation.³¹ In both cases, the saints function as active mediators between the believer's external reality and the internal reality of the image within the image.

In Carello's painting, the image within the image functions as an actual retable: a marble frame appears above the altar, and an altar cross is placed on the mensa. The two saints stand before it, awestruck at the sight, and regard the mystery of the Incarnation presented to them. The saints thus replicate and mirror, within the picture, the worshipper's situation in front of it, so that the viewing experience is intensified simultaneously through identification and reflective rupture. In Venanzi's painting, the reference to the viewer is even more pronounced. The location of the two saints lacks clear spatial definition; they inhabit an intermediary realm of indeterminate reality. Looking out from this space, the saints emphatically confront the viewer with their grave faces and gestures. Saint Barbara especially insistently the viewer's gaze by pointing to the image within the image, which appears to have been revealed exclusively for the latter's benefit by the angels raising the curtain before her eyes.

In both paintings, the subject matter of the image within the image is the unseeable and non-visualizable mystery of the Incarnation, the union of divine Logos and human nature. According to Thomas Aquinas, this event takes place beyond the *ratio* of the natural world, 'by ineffable, miraculous ascent' ('per ineffabilem assumptionem').³² In contrast to the paintings of Antonello da Messina discussed above, the works by Carello and Venanzi represent the

30 Galante Garrone G., in Giovanni R. – Macco M. di, *Diana Trionfatrice: Arte di Corte nel Piemonte* (Turin: 1989) 242f, no. 264.

31 Mendogni P.P., in Emiliani A. (ed.), *La pittura in Emilia e in Romagna: Il Seicento*, 2 vols. (Milan: 1994) II 104.

32 Gilson, "L' 'esse' du Verbe incarnée".



FIGURE 2.12 *Sebastiano Carello, St. Catherine of Siena and St. John the Baptist before a Painting of the Annunciation (ca. 1645). Savigliano, Museo Civico.*

IMAGE © ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO MUSEO CIVICO A.OLMO, SAVIGLIANO (CN), N.RO INV.232.

paradox of an implied non-visualizability through a visibly identified 'as if' structure, that of the image within the image. The image reveals to the viewer the various levels involved in the descent of divinely bestowed grace. It descends, via Mary's mediation and the mediation of the two saints, to the worshipper as its ultimate recipient. What is thus conveyed to the latter is not only the Incarnation itself as a mystery of faith, but equally the mediated character of the viewer's own access to the revelation of that mystery. The image presents itself as a medium for delivering the promise of salvation, and at the same



FIGURE 2.13 *Giovanni Venanzi, St. Nicholas and St. Barbara before a painting of the Annunciation (1667). Parma, Museo Diocesano.*

IMAGE © ROME ISTITUTO CENTRAL PER IL CATALOGO E LA DOCUMENTAZIONE.

time as an instrument for the guidance and, as it were, the religious education of the viewer's gaze.

The poetological discourse of the Cinquecento articulates what these paintings put into concrete form. Alessandro Piccolomini's commentary on Aristotle (1575) states, 'the actors are those persons who represent and not those who are represented. [...] the representation is not reality itself' ('l'imitazione non è lo stesso vero').³³ The irrevocable difference between what is presented to the viewer and the reality to which that presentation refers, between *cosa rappresentante* and *cosa rappresentata*, is the actual insight disclosed by the viewing of the paintings. Despite a certain implied correspondence, it is at once an insight into the gulf that separates the beholder's own situation of contemplating the picture from the situation of the saints within the picture. The appeal to the viewer acquires all the more force: he is urged to open himself to the experience of an inner revelation through visual contemplation.

To be sure, beyond contemporary poetological discourse, one can hardly overlook the ostentatious and also didactic character of these later works. In categorical contrast to Antonello, they allude to the mystery of the Incarnation, by staging what one might call a saintly annunciation, the presentation of an image of the Annunciation to the beholder. The works aim primarily to lend credence to the authority attributed to the saints as mediators between heaven and earth within the hierarchical doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. In their rhetoric and structure, these images establish what one might describe as an attempt to control religious viewing and the forms of inner experience that it activates. The strategic direction of the gaze corresponds to the spiritual guidance offered by the saints, to whom believers are asked to entrust themselves.

It is well known that these sorts of claims to authority on the part of images had been an issue at least since the Council of Trent and its decrees concerning the veneration of images. The role and function of images was repeatedly discussed and justified in the theoretical writings of the Counter-Reformation. As part of the efforts of the *Riforma Cattolica* to re-enforce charismatic concepts of the religious image in the face of Evangelical criticism, the hierarchical idea of the religious control of the faithful through the image played a decisive role. The Tridentine decree on sacred images instructed bishops and other religious authorities to convey the mysteries and teachings of Christian doctrine by way

33 See Schröder G., *Logos und List. Zur Entwicklung der Ästhetik in der frühen Neuzeit* (Königstein/Ts. 1985) 71f. Cf. the fundamental study Schöne W., *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock*, 3rd edition (Munich: 1993) 185f, 208f, esp. 223f, on the pictorial character of contemporary theater and on the performative, self-referential quality of theatrical productions at the time.

of images, through which believers could be educated and purified, and their faith consolidated. The saints in particular were to be presented to the eyes of the believers (*oculis fidelium*) as divine intermediaries and as models of piety and devout practice.³⁴ One of the most prominent representatives of Counter-Reformation art theory, Gabriele Paleotti, declared in his *Discorso intorno alle imagini* (1582), that Christian images were 'instruments for joining man to God' and that their ultimate meaning resided in their power to 'persuade a person to be pious and to submit himself to God'.³⁵

The rhetorical role played by the saints in the works of Venanzi and Carello, where their gazes and gestures mediate between the represented religious event and the outside viewer, corresponds unmistakably to Paleotti's premises. The pictorial representations rhetorically call on the viewer to participate in the miraculous event presented and to contemplate its intrinsic mystery. At the same time they uphold a distance between the viewer and the depicted

34 Mansi I.D. (coll.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* [...]. Vol. 33, eds. L. Petit – J.B. Martin J.B. (Paris: 1902; reprint ed., Graz: 1961) 171f: 'Illud vero diligenter doceant episcopi, per historias mysteriorum nostrae redemptionis, picturis, vel aliis similitudinis expressas, erudiri et confirmari populum in articulis fidei commemorandis, et assidue recolendis; tum vero ex omnibus sacris imaginibus magnum fructum percipi, non solum, quia admonetur populus beneficiorum et munerum, quae a Christo sibi collata sunt; sed etiam, quia Dei per sanctos miracula et salutaria exempla oculis fidelium subjiciuntur, ut pro iis Deo gratias agant, ad sanctorumque imitationem vitam moresque suos componant, excitenturque ad adorandum ac diligendum Deum, et pietatem colendam. Si quis autem his decretis contraria docuerit, aut senserit, anathema sit'. Also see Aschenbrenner T., *Die tridentinischen Bildervorschriften: Eine Untersuchung über ihren Sinn und ihre Bedeutung* (Freiburg i.Br.: 1930); Jedin H., "Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung", *Theologische Quartalschrift* 116 (1935) 143–188, 404–429; idem, "Das Tridentinum und die Bildenden Künste", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1963) 329–339; idem, *Der Abschluß des Trienter Konzils 1562/63: Ein Rückblick nach vier Jahrhunderten* (Münster: 1963); idem, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, IV, 2 (Freiburg i.Br.-Basel-Vienna: 1975) 183f; Seidel M., *Venezianische Malerei zur Zeit der Gegenreformation: Kirchliche Programmschriften und künstlerische Bildkonzepte bei Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese und Palma il Giovane* (Münster: 1996) 21f, 309f; and Hecht C., *Katholische Bildertheologie im Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock: Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti und anderen Autoren* (Berlin: 1997) 17f and passim.

35 Paleotti G., *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (Bologna: 1582), in Barocchi P. (ed.), *Trattati d'Arte del Cinquecento*, II (Bari: 1961) 117–509, esp. 215: 'strumenti per unire gli uomini con Dio' and 'persuadere le persone alla pietà et ordinarle a Dio'. For the significance of Paleotti's treatise see Prodi P., *Ricerche sulla teorica delle arti figurative nella riforma cattolica* (Bologna: 1984), esp. 25f, 55f; and Hecht, *Katholische Bildertheologie*, passim.

event. While testifying to the veracity and authenticity of what is depicted, they nevertheless ensure that the viewer remains aware of its specifically pictorial reality. The achievement of these images lies in demonstrating the non-visualizable dimension of the divine mystery (*assumptio ineffabilis*, in the words of Thomas Aquinas), precisely by displaying it as an image within the image. The mysterious event is represented in such a way that although true and actual, it does not belong to the temporal and spatial reality either of the saints or of the beholder. This is particularly so in Giovanni Venanzi's painting, where the image within the image is an unmistakable replica of the famous, much adored and miraculous Annunciation fresco in SS. Annunziata in Florence [Fig. 2.14], renewed for its widespread veneration far beyond Florence, which lends it (in Venanzi's painting) an aura of both authenticity and miraculous power, in a word: an aura of the real presence of divine grace, though mediated only through the reality of painting.³⁶

Bernini's ensemble for the *Cappella Fonseca* in San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome, dated ca. 1663–1675, can be placed at the end of this short series of examples [Fig. 2.15].³⁷ Once again, the relationship of the believer to the divine mystery is marked by both participation and separation. Above the altar appears an oval image of the Annunciation, held by two bronze sculptures of angels. The image they carry is a copy of a painting by Guido Reni in the Palazzo Quirinale [Fig. 2.16].³⁸ The donor, Gabriele Fonseca, emerges from a rectangular niche to the left of the altar to look at the painting [Fig. 2.17]. The gesture of his hand, piously placed on his chest, echoes the posture of the angel on the right, who looks down at him and who, in turn, only echoes Mary's gesture in the painting of the Annunciation [Fig. 2.18]. The Virgin, who receives the Lord's supreme grace with an expression of devotion and humility (*humiliatio*), thus figures as

36 On the miraculous image in Florence see Paatz W. and E., *Die Kirchen von Florenz* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1955), vol. 1, 97f; on the character of its renewed veneration in the Counter-Reformation, which is apparent in the widespread dissemination of copies and prints, see Casalini E., *La SS. Annunziata di Firenze: Studi e documenti sulla chiesa e il convento* (Florence: 1971) 51f; and Wazbinski Z., "L'Annunciazione della Vergine nelle Chiese della SS. Annunziata a Firenze: un contributo al moderno culto dei quadri", in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth* (Florence: 1985) vol. 2, 533–549.

37 Hibbard H., *Bernini* (Harmondsworth: 1965) 217f; Dobias J., "Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Fonseca Chapel in San Lorenzo in Lucina, Rome", *Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978) 65–71; Wittkower R., *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*, with a catalogue raisonné, 3rd edition, eds. H. Hibbard, T. Martin and M. Wittkower (Oxford: 1981) 256f, no. 75; Scribner III C., *Gianlorenzo Bernini* (New York: 1991) 43f, 114f; and Careri G., *Bernini: Flights of Love, The Art of Devotion* (Chicago: 1995) 11f.

38 Pepper D.S., *Guido Reni* (New York: 1984) 38.



FIGURE 2.14 Unknown artist, *Miraculous image of the Annunciation* (14th cent.). Fresco. Florence, ss. Annunziata.

IMAGE © AUTHOR.

a model for imitation (*imitatio*) and spiritual assimilation. She is an example not only to the donor, Gabriele Fonseca—whose first name, Gabriele, is that of the angel of the Annunciation, a fact that undoubtedly played a role for the overall design—but also to the pious viewer who kneels at the chapel's altar and gazes up at the painting of the Annunciation.³⁹ Implied are the Gospel words, 'And blessed is she who believed' ('beata, quae credidisti').⁴⁰ Mary's pure faith and her submission to the will of God supply a model of inner conformity and a warrant of spiritual salvation.

The descent of heavenly grace is implied by a sequence that unfolds as a progressive change in materials and modes of reality: from the suspended painted image via the bronze relief of the angels, who hold it aloft and seem to be emerging from the wall, down to the three-dimensional bust of Fonseca and, finally, to the concrete and lively presence of the believer himself; and

39 See the detailed remarks of Careri G., "Il busto di Gabriele Fonseca nel 'bel composto' di Bernini", in GentiliA. – Morel P. – Cieri Via C. (eds.), *Il ritratto e la memoria: Materiali 3*, (Rome: 1993) 195–204; also Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love*, esp. 15, 25f, 30f.

40 *Luke 1:45.*



FIGURE 2.15 *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cappella Fonseca (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina.*

IMAGE © AUTHOR.



FIGURE 2.16 *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cappella Fonseca, detail with the altar painting of the Annunciation after Guido Reni (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina.*
IMAGE © AUTHOR.

from the imaginary presence of the ‘Very Highest Potency’ of the Holy Spirit,⁴¹ down to the physical, earthly existence of man. The worshiper accordingly comprehends the mystery of the Incarnation through a process of participation and internal assimilation.

Giovanni Careri has pointed out the correspondence between the conception of the chapel’s decoration and the devotional and meditative practice of

⁴¹ *Luke 1:35: ‘virtus Altissimi’.*



FIGURE 2.17 *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cappella Fonseca, detail with the portrait bust of the donor Gabriele Fonseca (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina.*
IMAGE © AUTHOR.



FIGURE 2.18 *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cappella Fonseca, detail with an angel holding the altar painting of the Annunciation after Guido Reni (ca. 1663–1675). Rome, San Lorenzo in Lucina.*

IMAGE © AUTHOR.

‘inner imagination’, propagated above all by the Jesuits.⁴² Moreover, of special significance here is the fact that the depiction of the Annunciation is explicitly presented as an image by means of a distinctly contoured and richly veined marble frame. For the representation embodies, like an external projection, the image that Fonseca produces in his inner imagination. Through the contemplation of an external image, Fonseca, by analogy to the event depicted in it, receives on his part what Ignatius of Loyola called an ‘inner knowledge of the Lord’ (‘conocimiento interno del Señor’).⁴³

In conclusion, what finds expression in the two examples analysed here (Antonello da Messina and Bernini), notwithstanding their different contexts, materials, formats, etc., is essentially the notion that the image functions in a specific manner as a *medium* of visibility and visualization, and more precisely as a medium situated right in the intermediate zone between concrete sensual experience and the trans-material imaginary of the Incarnation. By taking this in-between position, that is to say, by performatively mediating between these polarities while also maintaining their dissociation, the image proves capable of generating a specific type of experience, one that oscillates in an intricate manner between perceptions of *similarity* and those of *difference*. It is this genuine potency of pictorial experience which could be called, in the end, the pictorial poetics of Incarnation.

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42 Careri, “Il busto di Gabriele Fonseca” 202f; and Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love* (1995) 33f, esp. 38f.

43 S. Ignazio di Loyola, *Esercizi spirituali, con testo originale a fronte*, ed. P. Schiavone (Milan: 1995) 188f, quotation 190; also see Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love* 33f. On the structuring of the relationship between the visible and the invisible in Ignatius’ process of the imagination, see Fabre P.-A., *Ignace de Loyola: le lieu de l’image* (Paris: 1992) 46f, 265f.

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A Meaty Incarnation: Making Sense of Divine Flesh for Aztec Christians

Jaime Lara

Unless you eat the flesh-meat of the Son of the Virgin, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.

JOHN 6:53 [IN THE NAHUATL TRANSLATION BY FRAY BERNARDINO DE SAHAGÚN, C. 1540]

In the Romance languages that are closest to Latin, there is no distinction between the word ‘flesh’ and the word ‘meat’; they are one and the same. In Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, *carne* translates the Latin word *carnis*. The Aztecs of central Mexico—who called themselves Mexica, and who spoke a language known as Nahuatl—would certainly have understood and appreciated this fact because long before encountering any European Christian, they already had a word for the concept of divine flesh. They called it *teonanácatl*, literally ‘flesh-meat of gods’, and correspondingly, *teotlaqualli*, ‘food of gods’.¹

The Mexica were an extremely religious people, totally immersed in a sacred cosmos, even though there was an apparent lack of uniformity in their liturgy and standardization of their mythology. There is no evidence among them of a formal *credo* of required beliefs or a circumscribed pantheon of gods— notions that would be alien to a Mesoamerican way of thinking, and no doubt a constant frustration to the European interpreters who expected similarities to the Greco-Roman and Germanic deities, not to mention to the God of the Hebrews. The Mexica’s animistic religion included a bewildering number of male and female deities, some of whom bore superficial affinities to Christ, the saints, and the Christian God.² These polymorphous deities were creators and

1 López Austin A., *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas* 1:162, the name most commonly applied to the human body considered as a whole is *tonacayo*, ‘the whole of our flesh’. The same term is applied to the fruits of the earth, especially to the most important one, maize, as we shall see. Every living thing is *tonacayotl*, ‘spiritual flesh-hood’ on earth.

2 Burkhardt L., “The Solar Christ in Nahuatl Doctrinal Texts of Early Colonial Mexico”.

destroyers, bearers of both good and ill; unlike their European counterparts, they were not understood as discrete persons or individuals. They not only personified the earth, wind, water, lightning, and other natural forces like fertility, regeneration, death, and war, but those forces were the gods themselves. Indeed, for the Mexica, who lacked a notion of the profane, the cosmos was alive and imbued with divine energies. Devotees encountered those energies in the use of psychotropic drugs, in the intoxication of pulque beer, in ecstatic dancing, but above all in ritual performance, which acted to interpret the place of individuals and peoples in the larger scheme of reality. This transmutable vitality could be found in all of matter, living and active, constantly feeding other living matter in the cosmos and needing to be fed.³

Incarnation and Comestability

The Aztecs understood that while they ate the flora and fauna of the earth, they in turn were consumed as 'first fruits' by the same landscape and its deities who ate them. Terrain, plant life, and human beings were locked in an eating relationship, a drinking-feeding frenzy. The landscape, with its sacred energies, was an edible reality for human beings, but humans were also the foodstuff of the sacred landscape.⁴ Reciprocity was the operative principle as 'debt payment' for vitality, and the necessarily violent consequence was sacrifice. Debt payment (*neixtlahualiztli*) was the most often used metaphor for sacrificial offering.⁵ For example, in the pre-Conquest period it was possible to have a deputy-victim sacrificed in one's stead. A person who survived a serious illness sacrificed a slave or even his own child to repay the debt. In this way, the debtor compensated for the death that he avoided. And when, for example, a slave personifying the patroness of weavers was killed, all the women of the weaving corporation somehow died through the victim, provided that they had contributed to her purchase and had assimilated themselves to her

3 See the studies by Carrasco D., "The Sacrifice of Tezcatlipoca"; idem, "Cosmic Jaws: We Eat the Gods and the Gods Eat Us"; Arnold P., *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*; Read K., *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztecs Cosmos*.

4 Arnold, *Eating Landscape*, passim; Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws", 435: '[H]umans and gods, in order to survive for a little while longer, were constantly on the hunt for vital forces embedded in the bodies of gods, humans, and plants'.

5 López Austin, *Human Body*, 2:292; *neixtlahualiztli*: 'a sacrifice in payment for goods received or hoped for from the gods'. Two other words for sacrifice are *uemmana* and *tlamana*, both of which etymologically have to do with the culinary action of kneading and rolling out corn dough for roasting.

by their penitential behavior of fasting, dancing, and self-bleeding.⁶ In Mexica belief, one could die for the many (*Ut unus moriatur homo pro multis*, John 18:14), or even for the life of the world.

But debts could also be redeemed by the sacrifice of a deity. In such payment, the gods gave their lives and liquids to men and women as food and drink, and humans in turn offered their lives and liquids to the gods as sustenance. The most important liquids were water and blood, metaphorically inseparable and equitable; these were offered to keep the sun in its orbit and forestall an apocalyptic disaster.⁷ Sunlight and blood were the root metaphors of Mexica society to such an extent that it is impossible to separate them; and they had much to do with the ways in which the Mexica later accepted the incarnate god of the Spaniards.⁸

The life of gods, humans, and plants was a radically localized, fleshy and comestible existence. In ritual cannibalism, the Aztecs believed that the human flesh they were ingesting was a sanctified substance, the flesh of the gods or, metaphorically put, 'a precious eagle-cactus fruit'.⁹ This corresponded to the fact that the human actor, when he or she performed in the ritual drama and was sacrificed, became a *teotl ixiptla*, a living icon of the god.¹⁰ These human beings encapsulated or incarnated the deity; they became 'the perfect god within a corporeal covering'.¹¹ Their divine iconography was heightened by their regal treatment as divinities, by the precious green jade jewelry that they wore, reminiscent of the verdant earth, and by their elaborate costumes that included corn tassels, or feathered headbands made to imitate mature corn.¹²

Mesoamerican peoples often considered humans to be another form of maize or flowers that are planted on the surface of the earth. They are born to die and become sustenance in sacrifice and ritual cannibalism, but they also contain within themselves the seeds of regeneration. Maize, that most common of foods for the Mexica spoken of as *tonacayo* 'the whole of our flesh', was also a god in their pantheon and a multi-layered figure of speech for sacrificial

6 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 6:33, and Graulich M., "Afterlife in Ancient Mexican Thought", 181–82.

7 López Austin, *Human Body*, 1:168.

8 Lara J., *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain*, 7–9, 64, 175, 203–4.

9 Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws", 435.

10 López Austin, *Human Body*, 1:376–77: 'It was not men who died, but gods—gods within a corporeal covering that made possible their ritual death on earth. If the gods did not die, their force would diminish in a progressively aging process'.

11 Carrasco, "Sacrifice of Tezcatlipoca", 46–50.

12 Arnold, *Eating Landscape*, 84, 160.

eating. As nourishment for human beings, maize was the symbolic sustenance for all living entities; in human sacrifice, people became metaphoric corn tortillas for other beings. In fact, human beings were born in corn: in the womb a baby was understood to be surrounded by maize gruel, just as the earth was surrounded by water. Human life was essentially 'cooked into existence', like bread in the oven.¹³ Thus at some point in a biological cycle of life one was either eating corn or eaten as corn. This was not the sad or pessimistic outlook on the world of the Aztec, as some have suggested, but an indigenous one. 'Life was based on an interactive reality that food promoted in the relationship between life and death . . . Food was the vehicle of substantive transformation [transubstantiation] from one reality to another and therefore was an appropriate ritual articulation of transition between realms of being'.¹⁴ As historian David Carrasco pithily puts it, 'the gods eat us and we eat the gods'.¹⁵ Sacrificed human beings were twice transubstantiated: once into proxies of the divine, and a second time into a meal for gods and other humans. For a god to be incarnate, necessarily meant that the god be edible in the flesh. *Theophagia*, the ritualized eating of a god, thus became a divine *anthropophagia*.

Natus est ut Moreretur

The Mexica liturgy of life, death, incarnating and feeding took place in the *teocalli*, a pyramid-shaped temple located in a sacred precinct or compound. The human oblations were either chosen celebrities of Mexica society or, more often, captives obtained in warfare with the Aztec's neighboring tribes.¹⁶ During the ritual, the victim was stretched cross-wise on an elevated *momoxtli*, a stone altar. The momoxtli was the paradigmatic place of sacrifice, located as it was at the heart of the temple compound as an *axis mundi* connecting the upper and lower worlds.¹⁷ With simple geometry, it represented the *cemanahuac yollotli*

13 Ibid., 162. Compare this to similar medieval Christian metaphors of the Incarnation in Ferguson O'Meara C., "In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb: The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art".

14 Arnold, *Eating Landscape*, 164.

15 Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws".

16 Mexica children were also rounded up for sacrifice at times of severe drought.

17 In Mexica cosmology, there existed multiple upper levels culminating in Omeyocan, and multiple levels downward into Mictlán; but neither corresponded to the Judeo-Christian notion of heaven or hell.

the 'heart of the cosmos'; it was its incarnation.¹⁸ The momoxtli was simultaneously understood as a sacred mountain, the navel of the universe, a world tree, and a cornfield; anything that occurred on that spot had cosmic resonance. There the victim's heart was extracted from the body and placed in a *cuauhxicalli* receptacle (literally, an 'eagle vessel') through which it was symbolically transported by the solar eagle to the heavens [Fig. 3.1]. Some *cuauhxicalli* were



FIGURE 3.1 *The Florentine Codex, book 2. Aztec human sacrifice. From Sahagún, Historia general de las cosas, ed. Paso y Troncoso, 1905. PUBLIC DOMAIN.*

18 S. de Orduña, "The Tree, the Cross and the Umbrella: Architecture and the Poetics of Sacrifice".

actually in the form of an eagle, while others were more box-like [see Fig. 3.15]. In addition to acting as a heart container, the eagle vessel could be stuffed with feathers or papers that absorbed the sacred liquid and were then burned as a form of incense. After the sacrifice, the body was rolled down the steps of the teocalli and the victim was decapitated. The remaining human meat was dissected, and select portions were roasted. These mythic morsels of the victim were reserved to the priests and nobility, the select classes who had the privilege of communing in this way.¹⁹ Later chroniclers wryly commented that 'the lower classes rarely got a mouthful.' It should be noted that the original captor was forbidden to eat any part of his human quarry because a spiritual relationship, similar to that of god-parenthood, was established between the hunter and the hunted.²⁰

Less violent forms of communion involved eating other sacred foodstuffs. Our information comes from the European chroniclers, who could not but filter the data through their Christian and clerical lenses. One Franciscan account describes a celebration in honor of the god Tezcatlipoca in which a group of youngsters ate small pieces of dough made out of corn, amaranthine seeds and human blood, which were said to become *teonanácatl*, the 'flesh of the god'.²¹ A Dominican historian, Diego Durán, describes yet another communion day, a springtime feast in honor of the national deity of the Aztecs, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. After the blood of the sacrificial victims had been smeared on the doorways of the temples and chambers of the gods (not unlike the Hebrew practice during the exodus from Egypt), it was sprinkled on a dough-man that represented the flesh and bones of the deity.²² In a seeming foreshadowing of the Catholic feast of Corpus Christi, the bread-god was vested in precious

19 Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws", 435. For a literary/linguistic analysis of this topic, see C. Jáuregui, "Cannibalism, the Eucharist, and Criollo Subjects".

20 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 2:51–54. Sahagún's informants describe this in words reminiscent of the New Testament: "Shall I perchance eat my very self?" For when he had captured his prey, he had said: "He is as my beloved son", with the captive answering, "He is my beloved father".

21 Toribio de Motolinía, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 46, asserts that intoxicating sacred mushrooms were ingested as *teonanácatl*. The feast that Motolinía describes is probably that of *Panquezalitzli*, celebrated in November. To the present day, Mexicans eat 'pan de muertos' (dough of the dead) at the beginning of the same month; no doubt an event syncretized with the feast of All Soul's Day and the commemoration of the faithful departed.

22 López Luján L., *The Offerings of the Templo Mayor*, 283: 'Ministers and the faithful used the blood to anoint the supports, thresholds, and walls of the temples, as well as the rooms and the lips of the sacred images'. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, book 2, chap. 21, p. 52,

robes and carried around in procession. This dough-man, *tzoalli*, was then cut into pieces, distributed, and eaten by the lords, temple priests, and a select group of young men. It was held in great reverence and awe, and, like Viaticum, was even carried to the sick.²³ The ever-suspicious Diego Durán noted that

The people claimed that they had eaten the flesh and bones of the gods, though they were unworthy . . . Let the reader note how cleverly this diabolical rite imitates that of our holy Church, which orders us to receive the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, at Eastertide. Furthermore, this feast fell on the tenth of April, that is, around Easter . . . From these things two observations can be made: either our holy Christian religion was earlier known in this land, or the devil, our cursed adversary, forced the Indians to imitate the ceremonies of the Christian Catholic religion in his own service and cult, being thus adored and served.²⁴

Thus we see that the notion of eating human flesh, or the flesh of a god-man under the guise of dough, was neither new nor contrary to Aztec taste.²⁵ Both were *teotlaqualli*, the 'divine food'.²⁶ The same pre-Hispanic word was later recycled for the Eucharistic sacrament in Nahuatl hymnals and catechisms.²⁷

Evangelizing in Flesh and Blood

It was this strange world that Europeans invaded in 1519, led by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Four years later, after a military and psychological conquest, Christian missionaries began to arrive in the person of mendicant friars: the Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians. These evangelizers of the early sixteenth century brought with them a late-medieval, pre-Tridentine form of Christianity with its emphasis on the Triune God, the salvific passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of course, the key doctrine of the

mentions a hyssop that was inserted into the extracted heart and used for sprinkling the blood—also reminiscent of Hebraic practice.

23 José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, bk. 5, chap. 24

24 Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 94–95.

25 Motolinía, *History of the Indians*, 46–47. On anthropophagia, see the essays in Elizabeth Boone, *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*.

26 Durán, *Book of the Gods*, 115.

27 See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Psalmody Christiana*, 170–73 and *passim*.

Incarnation. They also brought medieval devotions to the Christian martyrs, the Five Wounds of Jesus, the *arma Christi* (the instruments of the Passion), and the nascent devotion to the Sacred Heart.²⁸ An engraving in a missiological text shows a Franciscan friar using a pointer to instruct the neophytes in the last events of the life of Christ [Fig. 3.2], from his agony in the garden, on the left, to his resurrection, on the right.²⁹ The visual, musical and theatrical arts proved to be the paramount way in which the truth of the new God and his religion was communicated to the Mexica converts, and in which they eventually participated with *gusto*.³⁰

By the 1530s the friars were gathering around them an elite group of native translators, ethnographic informants, scribes, manuscript illustrators, and eventually authors in their own right. They soon produced pictographic catechisms, bible translations and devotional literature in Nahuatl, and illustrated almanacs.³¹ Mexica artists, working under the tutelage of the friars, were becoming quite adept at imitating European artistic styles that had been transported to the New World via prints and small panel paintings. They soon learned the techniques of single-point perspective and realistic representation of the human physique, techniques useful for the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Christian story. As the Mexica converts soon learned through Nahuatl-language dance-songs, the exact moment of the Incarnation had transpired on a certain March 25th when the human noblewoman, *María*, was visited by a birdman named *Gabriel*. (Birdmen were important beings in Aztec mythology and art.) When Mary gave her *fiat* to the angel, Nahuatl speakers heard:

Right then our Lord, the Son of God, became a man within the womb of the Lady, Saint Mary, perfect virgin. Right then the Lady, Saint Mary, became God's Mother.

28 The evangelization techniques in the New World are unintelligible without referencing the 'frenzy for blood' in coeval European piety. See H. van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe*, and C. Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*.

29 Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica christiana* (1579). For a detailed analysis of this book see Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico*, 62–75.

30 Ibid., 158–69, 201–27, on musical and liturgical 'conquests' of Mexico.

31 Burkhart L., "The Amanuenses Have Appropriated the Text".



FIGURE 3.2 *Diego Valadés, Rhetorica christiana, 1579. Franciscan friar preaching with pictures.*
THE BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, YALE UNIVERSITY.

To which the pious neophyte was invited to respond:

Now God our Lord exceedingly exalts our lives—us, the people—for when He assumed our native body He became like us.³²

In this linguistic construction, the ‘native body . . . like us’ might well have been understood to mean that the second person of the Trinity became, not so much a generic male human being, as much as a specifically Mexica human being.

The Annunciation is one of the most frequent scenes in Latin American colonial art. In a Flemish-style mural, painted on the cloister walls of the Franciscan friary at Cuauhtinchan (Puebla) by anonymous native artists, we see that the Annunciation panel is flanked by accurate depictions of a jaguar displaying its fierce teeth and claws, and an eagle with its powerful beak and talons³³ [Fig. 3.3]. The Mexica artists have made the jaguar to float in free space, while the eagle, which really could hover in the air, has been given a circular perch of stone. In Mexica dualistic thought, the jaguar represented the maternal principle of the universe while the eagle represented the opposing and complementary paternal principle.³⁴ Therefore, the annunciation event, and the birth that resulted from it, has been bracketed with a cosmic significance.

Additionally, the two animals represent the elite members of Mexica military society, the jaguar and eagle knights [Fig. 3.4]. These Mexica cavaliers, who were honored as celebrities, commanded the wars with the neighboring tribes of the Aztecs to obtain captives for the temple sacrifices. Here they may act as a superhuman honor-guard at the moment when the Christian deity took on human meat. If we examine the mural closer, we notice that the eagle’s well-drawn wings and feathers mimic the wings and feathers of the archangel Gabriel, suggesting that both are messengers of the divine. But one detail might escape our notice: The eagle’s stone perch is, in reality, the top of a *momoxtli*, an altar for human sacrifice, suggesting, moreover, that in the Christian theology being instilled in the neophytes, the reason and finality of the incarnation

32 ‘In iehoatzi in totecuiio, in Dios tepiltzi, niman vel iquac yitictzinco oquichtli omuchiuhztino in cuiapilli sancta Maria, cenquizca ichpuchtli: nimā vel iquac teotl Dios inantzi muchiuhztino, in ciuapilli sancta Maria. . . In axca in iehoatzi totecuiio Dios, cenca oquimouecapanilhui in toieliz in titlaca: iehica ca inic oquimocuili in tomaceoalnacaio, otechmoampotitzino’, Sahagún, *Psalmody Christiana*, 104–105. These poetic catechetical texts in Nahuatl were meant to be danced to in the churchyards using ancient tunes, and they were coordinated with the liturgical calendar.

33 The place name *Cuauhtinchan* means “house/nest of eagles”.

34 López Austin, *Human Body*, 153 and 64; they also represented two of the cardinal directions: north and south.



FIGURE 3.3 *Anonymous, Cloister mural of the Annunciation (c. 1560). Ex-convento de San Juan Bautista, Cuauhtinchan, Puebla.*

PHOTO: J. LARA.



FIGURE 3.4 *The Florentine Codex, book 2. Aztec eagle and jaguar knights. From Sahagún, Historia general de las cosas, ed. Paso y Troncoso, 1905.*

PUBLIC DOMAIN.

was being presented as the self-sacrifice of Christ to become *teotlaqualli*, divine food that would save the cosmos from eternal destruction.

The reader will have noted that, in the epigram quoting *John* 6:53 that began this essay, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún avoided the title 'Son of Man' and replaced it with 'Son of the Virgin'. The former made no grammatical sense in Nahuatl, and the evangelizers wanted to make it clear that the *teotlaqualli* that Mexica-Christian communicants were receiving was the same flesh-meat to which the Virgin had given birth.

The Apocalyptic Christ

Although there are ample images of the Annunciation and the Nativity in Mexican colonial art, the friar's initial catechesis did not dwell on the infant Christ, but rather on the crucified and risen Christ who was thought to be on the verge of returning to earth for the events of the Last Days. The discovery of America reinvigorated all the medieval myths related to the End Times: the discovery of the Lost Tribes of Israel, the liberation of the Holy Land, the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem, the arrival of Antichrist, the return to earth of the cross and the *arma Christi*, and other events of the end times.³⁵ Even Christopher Columbus, who was a lay Franciscan tertiary and amateur biblical exegete, wrote a book on the subject, *El libro de la profecias* (The Book of the Prophecies, 1504), in which he predicted that the end of the world was only some 150 years in the future.³⁶ Several years earlier, Portuguese sailors had spotted the *arma Christi* in the night sky, the constellation known as the Southern Cross, a sure 'sign of the Son of Man' (cf. Matt 24:30) indicating that the culmination of the ages was proximate. This was one of the topics discussed by the pope, cardinals and bishops who met for the Fifth Lateran Council from 1512–1517. Therefore, during the early evangelization of the New World there existed an acute semiotic sensitivity to the 'signs of the times'.³⁷

While the missionary friars and their elite native translators were quick to notice some Aztec similarities to Christianity, and vice-versa, they were also aware of great differences. The Mexica lacked two beliefs that were deemed essential for Christian soteriology: the notion of eternity, and the concept of reward or punishment in an afterlife that was dependent upon deeds done

35 J. Ulibarrena, "La esperanza milenaria de Joaquín de Fiore y el Nuevo Mundo: Trayectoria de una utopía".

36 Columbus, *The 'Libro de las Profecías' of Christopher Columbus*, 90.

37 M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Late Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism*, 365; N. Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1527)".

in this life.³⁸ The most common way to ‘prove’ the Christian claims and tell the biblical story was by the ‘witness of the eyes’, that is, by visual means; but there was also a need to teach it economically in large-scale public art. Thus the program designers employed images from the ‘bookends’ of the Bible: the Genesis story of the temptation, fall and expulsion from the Garden; and by certain episodes extracted from the book of *Revelation* and chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel: Christ’s return as judge, the resurrection of the dead, and the resulting reward or punishment in an eternal heaven or hell. These concise vignettes proved to be a short-hand summary of the Judeo-Christian narrative and Christian doctrine; and the most important didactic tool was the image of the Last Judgment. Billboard-size murals of the Last Judgment were located in the outdoor confessional areas where penitents sat on the bench with a priest to confess their sins and receive absolution³⁹ [Fig. 3.5]. The models for the iconography were available in any number of



FIGURE 3.5 *Portico confessional area with mural of the Last Judgment (late 16th century). Ex-convento de Santa María Magdalena, Cuitzeo, Michoacán.*

PHOTO: J. LARA.

38 Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 69–71.

39 *Ibid.*, 71.

books with woodblock prints or copper engravings, and it should be noted that by the 1540s Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel mural of the Last Judgment was also being disseminated in prints that were copied by Mexica painters.⁴⁰

The Corn Christ

Around mid-sixteenth century, native artists and missionaries began to create verbal images of the Incarnate One that were bilingual, bicultural and bivisual, and that dared to recycle important metaphors from Mesoamerican religion, making the enfleshment of the divine palpable. A detailed examination of catechetical texts in Nahuatl confirms this, but so does art.⁴¹

While it is true that the iconography of Christian themes was imported from the Old World, many of the materials used in works of art were indigenous to the New World, for example, crucifixes whose corpus was made of corn [Fig. 3.6]. The use of this substance had deep significance, because maize was the staple food and had itself been a god in the Aztec pantheon. In a very Hebraic way, maize had been one of the principal 'first fruits' offered in the Mesoamerican temples, part of the sacrifices to the divine mouth of the earth deity.⁴² The Nahuatl word for maize dough is in fact 'our sweet sustenance' (*toneuhcayotl*), which lent itself metaphorically for both the flesh-meat of Christ hanging on the cross and for the same flesh-meat sacramentally eaten in the Eucharist. In fact, the Nahuatl verb 'to sacrifice' was the same as 'to knead and spread out', like the act of preparing the dough of the corn tortilla before roasting.⁴³

To make one of these statues, the corn husk was first opened and its 'heart' (pith) removed, much like the heart extraction of the pre-Hispanic sacrifices.⁴⁴ Then an armature was constructed of dried maize leaves or corn husks fastened together for the torso; for rigidity in the fingers and toes turkey feathers were employed. In some cases, the fabricators of the armature made use of sheaves of paper, and inside several sculptures the armature is a discarded

40 D. Mickenberg and L. Silver, *Graven Images: The Rise of Professional Printmakers in Antwerp and Haarlem, 1540–1640*, 17.

41 Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 186–253.

42 Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws", 440–41.

43 Read, *Time and Sacrifice*, 144–45, 176.

44 Carrillo y Gariel, *El cristo de Mexicaltzingo*, 9–19; Velarde Cruz, *Imaginería michoacana en caña de maíz*, 53, 57–58.



FIGURE 3.6 Anonymous, *Crucifix made from corn husks and corn paste (mid-16th century)*.
Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Zacatecas.

PHOTO: J. LARA.

Nahuatl codex of prayers and catechism texts, used no doubt because of its being sacred writing and hence ‘sacred stuffing’.⁴⁵

The framework was roughly covered with a mixture of corn-pith paste and a sticky mass obtained from orchid bulbs. After the figure was dry, a finer coating of the paste was spread over it like stucco and modeled to bring out the rib system and facial features; then this was painted. The profuse red blood was simulated by a compound of cochineal, which itself is the precious blood of an insect that feeds on the sacred *nopal* or ‘eagle-cactus’ fruit. All of the ingredients were not only technically successful, but also carried religious associations with pre-Hispanic divinities. Either the friars were ignorant of

45 Carrillo y Gariel, *El cristo de Mexicaltzingo*, 37–83. Paper was a material sacred to Mexica rituals: devotees pierced their own bodies, bleeding onto the paper, which was then burned as incense to the deity.

the connotations—which seems unlikely—or they thought of it as good and didactic. In fact, the bishop of Michoacán, Vasco de Quiroga, encouraged the making of such images under the direction of an aged Tarascan convert, a former pagan priest who knew the ancient technique. These corn crucifixes are vivid in color and extraordinarily light in weight, ideal for the long and exhausting Lenten processions; some are even movable ‘liturgical puppets’ still in use today.⁴⁶ In their own symbolic way, these effigies linked the passion of Christ on the cross to his Eucharistic body and blood ingested in the powerful ‘sacred tortilla’ of the Mass.⁴⁷

The Feathered Christ

In pre-conquest days, Mesoamericans had sacred cruciforms; these were totems of the cardinal directions, and associated with sacred birds and feathers. Feathered headgear and vesture had been the exclusive attributes of the gods, Mexica nobility, and the eagle knight warriors; it carried connotations of royalty, valor, and divinity. In the evangelization period, Mexica sculptors created stone crosses (without corpus) where the crossbeam and headpiece terminate in stylized plumes, and in so doing lent the prime symbol of the new religion, the cross, a regal-divine status [Fig. 3.7]. These eschatological crosses incorporate the *arma Christi* shining among the night stars—all signs of the soon-to-return Christ.⁴⁸

In another medium, real feathers were employed to create elaborate ‘mosaic’ panels, like this splendid *Salvator Mundi* [Fig. 3.8]. The most precious plumes used here were those of the parrot, hummingbird, and sacred quetzal bird—divinities in the Aztec pantheon. As one modern commentator has put it, ‘The feathery texture lends this Christ not only a colorful brilliance, but also the immediate, tactile presence of divinity as sought by pre-Hispanic Mexican society. Whereas the Christian deity was incarnate as a man, the Mexica god manifested itself through an accumulation of ritual emblems and objects. Its aura resided in all that covered, dressed and constituted it.’⁴⁹ Thus by employing feathers on crosses or for portraits of Christ, the same notions of divinity

46 X. Moyssén, *México: Angustia de sus cristos*, intro. xx.

47 In the Nahuatl Eucharistic texts, the word *tlaxcalli* (tortilla) is commonly used for the communion wafer.

48 On the history of the eschatological cross, see C. Vogel, “La croix eschatologique”; and for its presence in colonial Mexico, see Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 154–62.

49 S. Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest: The Mexican Indians and the European Renaissance*, 152.



FIGURE 3.7 *Anonymous, Stone atrial cross with plumed terminations, stars, and the instruments of the Passion (16th century). Iglesia de San Jerónimo, Huandacareo, Michoacán.*

PHOTO: J. LARA

and royalty were transferred to the Incarnate One, and would have been readable as such by the Mexica populace. Early Nahuatl hymns and catechetical texts also employ the mention of shimmering plumes for laudatory honorifics and as visible manifestations of divinity.⁵⁰

Feathers were even used sacramentally. An illustrated almanac, the *Codex Tlatelolco*, announces that in 1565 the seated Mexica noble, who was then a colonial governor, had donated a Eucharistic tabernacle to the local church (seen

50 Sahagún, *Psalmodia Christiana*, 17 and passim.



FIGURE 3.8 Anonymous, *Salvator Mundi* (16th century). Feather mosaic, 81 × 71 cm.

PHOTO: MUSEO NACIONAL DEL VIRREINATO INAH. USED WITH PERMISSION.

to his left). The tabernacle wears an honorific bonnet of green parrot feathers, surely not a European decoration⁵¹ [Fig. 3.9]. For the Aztecs, green feathers were reminiscent of verdant corn tassels, and iridescent feathers were special indicators of solar divinity, spiritual strength, edibility, and preciousness—all attributes of the new god.

⁵¹ See *Códice de Tlatelolco: Estudio preliminar*.



FIGURE 3.9 Codex Tlalelco, MS 35–39, *almanac for the year 1565*.
 PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA E
 HISTORIA, MEXICO CITY. USED WITH PERMISSION.

The Eagle Christ

Above, we looked at the images of the two animals/warriors in the Annunciation mural, and I suggested that the eagle was much more than a decorative flourish. The same almanac, the *Codex Tlalelco*, depicts the 1562 ceremonies for the laying of the cornerstone of the cathedral of Mexico City by the archbishop, viceroy, and Mexica nobles. A great eagle swoops down to participate in the liturgy together with costumed dancers who now represent Christianized eagle and jaguar knights [Fig. 3.10]. It appears that, by the second half of the sixteenth century, the knights had been fully integrated into Christian rituals, and the eagle had become an important symbol of the new religion.

European Christians had, of course, employed birds as symbolic of the sacred mysteries; the dove of the Holy Spirit that overshadowed the Virgin at



FIGURE 3.10 Codex Tlalelco, MS 35–39, *almanac for the year 1562*.

PHOTO: BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA E HISTORIA, MEXICO CITY. USED WITH PERMISSION.

the Annunciation was one of them. There was also the pelican, which was said to feed its young by tearing at its breast and nourishing them with its blood, and so it became an ideal sacrificial-eucharistic symbol. But in several colonial images, the Mexica artists replaced the lowly pelican with the more noble and macho eagle [Fig. 3.11]. The identification of the solar eagle with Jesus Christ had been made by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century, based on his interpretation of the first chapter of Ezekiel and the fourth chapter of Malachi. But he also employed Greco-Roman mythological lore wherein the eagle is the



FIGURE 3.11 *Anonymous, Mural painting of the eagle nursing its young with its blood (16th century). Iglesia del Divino Salvador, Malinalco, Morelos.*
 PHOTO: COURTESY OF MANUEL AGUILAR.

only creature that can fly close to the sun and look directly into it burning rays. 'Even so', says Gregory, 'Christ Incarnate is the only one who can approach the Godhead and gaze directly on the unseen Deity'.⁵² This is the kind of missiolog- ical thinking that the evangelizers also employed for inculturating Christianity into a Mexica ethos.

Christ the solar eagle appears painted on church walls in colonial Mexico, not as an afterthought, but as an integral part of the decoration [Fig. 3.12].

⁵² *Homilies of Gregory the Great: On Ezekiel*, 40–42.



FIGURE 3.12 *Anonymous, Mural painting of the sacred eagle holding a pennant, with corn crucifix below. (16th century). Iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel, Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo.*
PHOTO: J. LARA.

In the Augustinian church of Ixmiquilpan (Hidalgo) c. 1570, he even appears with a solar nimbus on the ceiling of this church, hovering directly above the high altar. The avian presence of the 'king of birds' in this way thereby suggests a theological association with the sacrificial nature of the Mass taking place below⁵³ [Fig. 3.13].

Sunlight and Sacrifice

A papal brief of Pope Paul IV dated 1558, encouraged such a 'guided syncretism' by urging the evangelizers to replace the old pagan feasts with Christian devotions. The pope's words are very significant for a solar Christology that developed in Spanish America: 'The days which the Indians, according to their ancient rites, dedicate to the *sun* and to their idols should be replaced with

53 Wright Carr, "Sangre para el sol: Las pinturas murales del siglo XVI en la parroquia de Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo", 86.



FIGURE 3.13 *Anonymous, Ceiling painting of the solar eagle above the high altar (16th century), Ixmiquilpan.*

PHOTO: J. LARA.

feasts in honor of the *true sun*, Jesus Christ, his most holy Mother and the saints whose feast days the Church celebrates.⁵⁴

The Mexica's sacrificial aspects of sunlight and the solar eagle were also incorporated into the ubiquitous symbol of Christianity, the cross. Several of the extant evangelization crosses have an obsidian mirror inserted at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal beams, where Christ's head would be [Fig. 3.14]. Obsidian, a black volcanic glass, was a god in the Aztec pantheon; obsidian inserts had been used on stone idols as eyes or heart pendants; and blades of obsidian were used to extract the hearts on the altars. Once again, the root metaphors of Aztec mythology, sun and blood, appear united here, but in a way useful for Christian catechesis and for referencing the incarnate light of the world.

Human sacrifice had been outlawed immediately after the Conquest. At the same time, one of the necessary challenges for the friars was to rehabilitate the very notion of sacrifice for the once-and-for-all nature of Christ's death on Calvary, that is to say, that his self-giving replaced all others and terminated the need for additional sacrifices of human beings. Certainly this was a constant theme in the friars' preaching and catechesis, but it was also accomplished visually because several of the evangelization crosses have an old *cuauhxicalli* vessel, an 'eagle box', inserted into their base in an obvious and recognizable way⁵⁵ [Fig. 3.15]. In a metaphorical sense, they are there to accept Christ's divine and human heart, and to contain his precious liquid. Moreover, among Nahuatl-speakers today, the spiked base or podium on which the cross stands is still called a *momoxtli*, the old Nahuatl word for an altar of human sacrifice, hence reinforcing the identification of a sacred oblation.⁵⁶

In conclusion, the mid-sixteenth-century in Mesoamerica was an exceptionally creative moment for the visual representation of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Corn, eagles, feathers, mirrors, and heart boxes were the ways in which the friars and their Mexica collaborators could present the new incarnate deity as a sacrificial victim; one whose blood sustained the world in existence, or better, made possible access to a new and eternal world. Perhaps the native scholars, even more than the European friars, were the imaginative inventors responsible for the particular flavors, colors, figures, neologisms, and allegories that inculturated Christianity assumed in Mexico. In the new

54 B. de Tovar, *Compendio Bulario Indico*, 1:325, emphasis mine.

55 Another example is found at Cuernavaca, Morelos. See Lara, *City Temple, Stage*, 172–73.

56 My thanks to Nahuatl scholar Jonathan Amith for this information on contemporary speakers of the language. By the early seventeenth century, the Nahua writer Diego de San Antón Muñón Chimalpáhin Quauhtlehuanitzin could define *momoxtli* as a podium or 'altar on which they erect a stone cross'.



FIGURE 3.14 *Anonymous, Stone atrial cross with obsidian mirror insert, flowers and blood glyphs (16th century). Iglesia de San José, Ciudad Hidalgo, Michoacán.*
PHOTO: J. LARA.



FIGURE 3.15 *Reused Aztec cuauhxicalli vessel inserted at the base of the atrial cross (after 1585). Iglesia de Santa María Nativitas, Mexico City.*
PHOTO: COURTESY OF COLECTIVO TOLLAN.

dispensation eagle and jaguar knights now became Christian heroes; feather crowns ennobled a Eucharistic tortilla; the recycled *momoxtli* altar and *cuauhxicalli* vessel now encoded the once-and-for-all heart sacrifice of Calvary. Christ as the embodied sun or the solar eagle of Mexica Christianity was the result of the convergence of root metaphors common to Aztecs and Europeans alike. In considering this exceptional moment in religious and art history, we might even go so far as to say that the Christian deity was twice incarnated: once, in earthly time as human meat; and a second enfleshment into a unique cultural system by metaphor, symbol, and the arts.

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The Ineffability of Incarnation in Le Brun's *Silence or Sleep of the Child*

Matthieu Somon

To Andrea, Marika and Stephanie

Le Brun's painting entitled *The Silence or The Sleep of the Child*, executed about 1655 and currently in the Louvre, has remained remarkably understudied [Fig. 4.1]. We do not actually know for whom it was painted, and scholars in their essays usually defer to Claude Nivelon's testimony about this canvas:



FIGURE 4.1 Charles Le Brun, *Silence or Sleep of the Child* (ca. 1655). Oil on canvas, 87 × 118 cm. PARIS, LOUVRE MUSEUM.

* This study was undertaken in the frame of the annual subject *Silence-Schweigen* proposed by Andreas Beyer, director of the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte of Paris. I am very grateful to this institution and its members for their support. My gratitude also goes to Camille François for her attentive review.

C'est dans ce moment que la Vierge fait signe à cet enfant prophète [Jean-Baptiste] de ne le [Jésus] pas approcher ni toucher. Mais la pensée de M. Le Brun est bien au-dessus de cette expression commune par cette délicatesse spirituelle qu'il a toujours fait entrer dans ses sujets comme un sel attique et précieux, qui est tel en ceci que saint Jean, montrant le Sauveur du monde, semble dire ces belles paroles, que c'était l'agneau qui devait ôter les péchés du monde. La Vierge, lui empêchant de proférer ce qu'il signifie de l'indice, lui ordonne de garder le silence sur un si grand secret, qu'elle réservait même dans son cœur parce que le temps de se manifester n'était pas encore accompli.¹

In the iconographies of the Virgin and Child and Holy Family, the slumbering Child swaddled in a white sheet was commonly perceived as a prefiguration of the death of Christ wrapped in his white shroud.² In his composition, Le Brun follows this tradition prevalent in the art of the Venetian Renaissance that he so deeply admired.³ Indeed, according to Nivelon, Le Brun's first biographer, this painting—which shows the Holy Family silently contemplating the sleep of the Child, revering him as the incarnate son of God, and insulating him from the playful highjinks of John the Baptist—signifies that it is not yet time to

- 1 Nivelon C., *Vie de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages*, ed. L. Pericolo (Geneva: 2004) 163–164. This interpretation can be found in Thuillier J. – Montagu J., *Charles Le Brun: 1619–1690, peintre et dessinateur* (Paris: 1963) 48–49 (cat. n°20); Gareau M. – Beauvais L., *Charles Le Brun: premier peintre du roi Louis XIV* (Paris: 1992) 160; and Humbert M., *Pour une iconologie du silence: sur les traces de Marcel Duchamp et de l'iconographie* [Thèse de doctorat, Paris 1] (Lille: 1997) 222–224. On the relationship between this canvas and the Incarnation, also see Le Pas de Sécheval A., "L'Incarnation ou le Christ enfant", in Bonfait O. – McGregor N., (eds.), *Le Dieu caché: les peintres du Grand Siècle et la vision de Dieu* (Rome: 2000) 102–103.
- 2 On this subject, see Meiss M., "Sleep in Venice: Ancient Myths and Renaissance Proclivities", in idem, *The Painter's Choice: Problems in the Interpretation of Renaissance Art IV* (New York: 1976) 228. I am grateful to Klaus Krüger, Professor of Art History at Freie Universität of Berlin, for calling my attention to this important study. The iconography of the *Madonna del Silenzio* endured throughout the seventeenth century, as is suggested by a comparison of the version by Annibale Carracci and Luca Giordano [Fig. 4.5]. For a precise analysis of this iconography, see Benthien CL., *Barockes Schweigen. Rhetorik und Performativität des Sprachenlosen im 17. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: 2006). I am grateful to Stephanie Marchal helping me obtain a copy of this book.
- 3 In 1644, while he was in Rome, Le Brun asked his main patron, Pierre Séguier, for permission to stay in Venice and study the great Renaissance masters (alas, in vain). See his letter to Pierre Séguier, dated 12th december 1644, in Jouin H., *Charles Le Brun et les arts sous Louis XIV. Le premier peintre, sa vie, son œuvre, ses écrits, ses contemporains, son influence d'après le manuscrit de Nivelon et de nombreuses pièces inédites* (Paris: 1889) 398.

reveal the secret of the Incarnation nor to announce that this is the Messiah come to save humanity. Yet, Nivelon himself writes that these few observations do little to capture the picture's deeper meaning:

Les observations que ce tableau renferme mériteraient seules une explication particulière et plus étendue. [...] Mais la pensée de M. Le Brun est bien au-dessus de cette expression commune par cette délicatesse spirituelle qu'il a toujours fait entrer dans ses sujets comme un sel attique et précieux [...].⁴

Let us now try to show what the meaning of this painting could have been for Le Brun's contemporaries. Since scholars in their studies have traced its artistic genealogy to the *Madonne del Silenzio* of Michelangelo,⁵ Annibale Carracci and Domenichino, we shall then attempt to discover what is original about Le Brun's painting [Figs. 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4].⁶ We could add to these artistic sources some of Poussin's *Holy Families*: Le Brun probably borrowed from his Roman mentor's *Holy Family, or Madonna on the Stairs*, painted around 1648, the arrangement of Saint John the Baptist, Saint Ann and the Virgin [Fig. 4.6]. The meditative Zachariah in Le Brun's composition also evokes in reverse, Poussin's Joseph in the *Holy Family* executed around 1651 for the Duke of Créquy [Fig. 4.7].⁷

A Domestic Image of the Incarnation

Le Brun's composition distances itself from its predecessors by the number of characters—seven, whereas the other Roman *Madonne del Silenzio* quoted by him include only three or four figures [Figs. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4]—that populate

4 Nivelon, *Vie de Charles Le Brun* 164–165.

5 This composition by Michelangelo is lost, but its trace can be found in a drawing that once belonged to the Duke of Portland, in a first engraving by Giulio Bonasone made in 1561 and followed by many others, and in numerous painted pastiches, especially the one by Marcello Venusti.

6 Le Brun has probably seen Domenichino's painting in Jabach's collection. See Thuillier—Montagu, *Charles Le Brun: 1619–1690, peintre et dessinateur* 48–49; and Loire S., *École italienne, XVII^e siècle.1. Bologne* (Paris: 1996) 176–177.

7 All these paintings by Poussin were in French collections by the time Le Brun elaborated his *Silence*, which supports the view that they stimulated his invention. On the history of Poussin's *Holy Families*, see Rosenberg P. – Prat L.-A. (eds.), *Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)* (Paris: 1994) 397–399 and 463–465 (cat. n°173 and n°210).



FIGURE 4.2 *Giulio Bonasone after Michelangelo, Madonna del Silenzio (1561). Engraving, 40,2 × 26,8 cm.*

PRIVATE COLLECTION.



FIGURE 4.3 *Domenichino, Madonna del Silenzio. Oil on canvas, 50,8 × 68,6cm (ca. 1598–1600).*
HAMPTON COURT, COLLECTION OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND.



FIGURE 4.4 *Annibale Carracci, Madonna del Silenzio (ca. 1605). Oil on canvas, 38 × 47 cm.*
PARIS, LOUVRE.



FIGURE 4.5 Marck Quirin, after Luca Giordano, *La Sainte Vierge* (1774). Engraving, 22 × 24cm. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

the canvas and make it an ambitious study of the human figure, painted here in all its diversity: two children, two men and three women of all ages are portrayed in very varied positions—frontal, profile, three-quarter, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting or kneeling. The centripetal composition chosen by Le Brun draws the gaze of the onlooker to the Child, the brightest figure and the only naked one in the painting. The brightness of his flesh may echo John's figurative allusion to Christ as *Lux mundi* (John 8:12). As a matter of fact, all the characters in the composition reflect the light emanating from Jesus, Light of the world and Light of life, and underscore his autonomy, in that by their gestures and gazes they point at the Child's luminous and naked body without directly touching him [Fig. 4.1]. Yet, a part of the Lord's body remains in shadow. Nivelon gives a very clear explanation of this feature:



FIGURE 4.6 *Nicolas Poussin, Holy Family or Madonna on the Stairs (ca. 1648). Oil on canvas, 118 × 197 cm.*
CLEVELAND, MUSEUM OF ARTS.



FIGURE 4.7 *Nicolas Poussin, Holy Family (ca. 1651). Oil on canvas, 96,5 × 133 cm.*
PASADENA, NORTON SIMON MUSEUM.

Il semble que, par une demi-teinte claire et obscure dont son chef [de Jésus] est couvert et un peu de son corps, il ait voulu exprimer que cette divinité humanisée était cachée sous ce noble voile de chair.⁸

This expanse of shadow shrouding the Child's radiant nudity—especially his head and his left leg—materializes his status of God hidden in a human body, according to Nivelon. The Child's partly darkened nudity would thus make visible his double nature, divine and human.

Le Brun sets the scene in a very ordinary *décor* figured in its most concrete details—a sleeping cat, a brazier, firewood, and pitchers can be seen—probably in order to stress the humanity of the naked Child and of the Holy Family, depicted here in a kind of everyday context which doubtless touched the seventeenth-century viewer and gave him a keen feeling of the mystery of the Incarnation. The concern for verisimilitude and faithfulness to Scripture not only appears in the brazier, which recalls the Holy Family's winter-time flight into Egypt to escape Herod's persecution, but also in such indigenous details as the ibis and the palm tree, which give evidence of the painter's efforts to secure topographical accuracy. These details, which place the composition firmly in the realm of the material and the everyday, were probably included to make patently apprehensible to everyone the reality of the Incarnation.⁹ The admonitory attitude of Zachariah, who joins his hands in prayer while watching the Child, also accentuates the devotional function of the picture:

Zacharie, sous la figure d'un vieillard venerable couvert d'un grand manteau violet, et dans un caractère digne du rang de sacrificateur, joint les mains comme en action de graces, voyant celui qu'il avait nommé, étant rempli du Saint-Esprit, la corne du salut dans la maison de David (*Zach.* 13:1 and *Luc.* 1:68–69).¹⁰

8 Nivelon, *Vie de Charles Le Brun* 164.

9 Nivelon, *Vie de Charles Le Brun* 164, confirms this Egyptian context: 'Ce sujet est dans une chambre dessous un grand rideau étendu en manière de plafond. Les pensées de quelques Pères de l'Eglise ont été que ces saintes personnes, fuyant pour éviter les recherches d'Hérode, furent quelque temps cachées dans le désert, et qu'ils se trouvèrent ensemble dans un même lieu, et sont encore dans le sentiment que sainte Anne fut conservée, par une grâce spéciale, pour voir et contempler cet objet si ardemment souhaité pour le salut des hommes.'

10 Ibidem 165.

The small dimensions of the canvas suggest that the Louvre painting was probably made to satisfy private devotion and encourage pious contemplation of the Incarnation. In fact, Le Brun offers a domestic image of this mystery that clearly distinguishes him from his Italian predecessors (Michelangelo, Domenichino and Annibale), as also does his delicate use of *chiaroscuro*. The descriptive intensity of his brushwork, concentrated at the top right corner of the canvas, depicts the prosaic appearance of the house. In this zone, one room follows another, in a sequence gradually bathed by light, which recedes from the viewer according to perspectival conventions, aerial (cold tones are more remote than warm tones) and geometrical (the rectilinear joists, doorframes and window frames extend deeply into the space). Le Brun's free brushwork obviously differentiates him from his Italian predecessors: this space is rendered in cold tones (mainly grey and blue) that create a distinct break, lightening and subtly moderating the rest of the composition, which is dominated by warmer tones. Le Brun's invention, by emphasizing the mundanity of the Holy Family, probably served to inspire adoration of the mystery of the Incarnation, miraculous synthesis of human and divine in the unique figure of Christ.

Nevertheless, Le Brun's domestic portrayal of the Incarnation is saturated in silence, and this silent atmosphere requires more precise analysis.

A Silence Fed by Negative Theology

Although Nivelon himself encourages the reader to dwell on the deeper meaning of *Silence* belied by the picture's prosaic appearance,¹¹ his biography of Le Brun contains some significant gaps, such as the artist's links with the Oratorian spirituality, which Benedict Gady's recent work has brought to light.¹² In the painting, the Virgin orders John the Baptist to be silent [Fig. 4.1]. Moreover, the attention Le Brun paid to the Virgin's gesture of silence legitimates a comparison with the Cardinal of Bérulle's spirituality, which was centered on the Incarnation—Pope Urban VIII called Bérulle the 'Apostle of the Incarnate Word'¹³—and, specifically, on the virtue of silence epitomized by the Virgin. Indeed, Pierre de Bérulle, who introduced the Oratory in France, dedicated several *conferences* to the silent Virgin, in which he closely examines those moments during Jesus' childhood when she chose to remain mute:

11 See above and note 4.

12 Gady B., *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun. Liens sociaux et production artistique* (Paris: 2010) 177 and 188–193.

13 Dagens J., *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique* (Paris: 1952) 291.

En voyant devant ses yeux, en son sein, en ses bras, cette même parole, la parole substantielle du Père, être muette et réduite au silence par l'état de son enfance, elle [la Vierge Marie] rentre en un nouveau silence et y est transformée à l'exemple du Verbe incarné qui est son Fils, son Dieu et son unique amour. Et sa vie se passe ainsi de silence en silence, de silence d'adoration en silence de transformation, son esprit et ses sens, conspirant également à former et perpétuer en elle cette vie de silence.¹⁴

Car aussi durant tout le temps de son enfance, nous n'avons que ces paroles qui nous soient rapportées de la conduite de la Vierge, et de sa pitié au regard de son Fils, et des choses qui sont dites de lui, et accomplies en lui : *Quant à Marie, elle conservait avec soin ces choses, en les méditant en son cœur* (Luc. 2:19). Voilà l'état et l'occupation de la Vierge, voilà son exercice et sa vie au regard de Jésus durant sa sainte enfance. À son exemple, je voudrais être et demeurer en silence et le conserver à son imitation.¹⁵

This is some historical justification for the parallel I am here drawing between Le Brun's *Silence* and Bérulle's works. The Cardinal of Bérulle was the cousin of Pierre Séguier, Le Brun's most important patron. Séguier greatly admired his cousin and commissioned Germain Habert to write a biography of the cardinal. Le Brun took part in the publication of this biography in Paris in 1646, creating its frontispiece [Fig. 4.9].¹⁶ Besides, we know that while he was painting the *Silence*, Le Brun made a series of paintings for the Magdalen Chapel in the Carmelite Church of Paris—and this very place included a monument dedicated to Bérulle, who had written *Élévations sur sainte Madeleine* in 1627.¹⁷ In addition, the year he painted *Silence*, 1655, Le Brun also executed the vault

14 Bérulle P. de, "De la naissance et enfance de Jésus", in idem, *Œuvres complètes I. Conférences et fragments III, Œuvres de piété 1–165*, ed. M. Dupuy (Paris: 1996) 151, no. 48.

15 Bérulle P. de, *Œuvres complètes I* 153.

16 Gady B., *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun* 177 and 188–193. On the Chancelier Séguier as a patron, and on his relations with Bérulle, see Nexon Y., *Le mécénat du chancelier Séguier (inédit)* [Thèse de l'École nationale des chartes] (Paris: 1976). Also see, by the same author, "La collection de tableaux du chancelier Séguier", *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, tome 140 (Geneva: 1982) 150–214 ; "Le mécénat du chancelier Séguier", in Mousnier R. – Mesnard J. (eds.), *L'âge d'or du mécénat 1598–1661* (Paris: 1985) 49–57; and "Topographie d'une collection d'art au xvii^e siècle : l'hôtel Séguier", *Studiolo* 8 (2010) 75–87.

17 Gady B., *L'ascension de Charles Le Brun* 191–193. Bérulle wrote the *Élévation à Jésus-Christ nostre Seigneur sur la conduite de son esprit et de sa grâce vers sainte Magdelaine, l'une des principales de sa suite et des plus signalétiques en sa faveur et en son Évangile*, published in Paris in 1627 and dedicated to the Queen of England, Henrietta Maria.

of the Saint-Sulpice seminary, whose iconographic program, created by Jean-Jacques Olier, one of Bérulle's most ardent admirers, was dedicated to the Virgin.¹⁸ These various circumstances provide a context for the execution of the *Silence*, as well as pointing to the close connection between Le Brun and Bérulle's entourage and spirituality.

In his analysis of the Virgin's silence, Bérulle indicates that her mute attitude is appropriate to her situation vis-à-vis the Child, who cannot speak because he is an *infans*. The Child's silence should be imitated by the believer:

Contemplons ce Silence. Adorons ce Silence. Imitons ce Silence, & comme Marie est tirée & ravie dans le Silence de Iesus Enfant, allons & adherons à Marie & luy demandons qu'elle nous y tire avec Elle. [...] Outre que le Silence est la principale louange & le plus grand hommage que nous puissions rendre à Dieu : dont l'immense grandeur nous ravit à nous mesme & nous oste toute parole : ce qui a induit le Sage à nous donner cet advis *Dieu est au Ciel & tu es en la Terre, & c'est pourquoi parle peu* (Eccl. 5).¹⁹

[...] le silence, comme nous enseigne saint Jean Climacus, est ce qui nous donne ouverture à l'oraison, dispose nos esprits à la contemplation, nourrit les sentimens de la devotion, conserve les ardeurs de la charité, nous fait profiter en la vertu & monter à Dieu ; parce que l'âme est dans le silence plus recueillie, plus attentive à soy, & en suite mieux préparée aux operations de Dieu.²⁰

In the painting, the Virgin's gesture recommends silence to all the characters and even to the viewer. This silent attitude was considered suitable for meditation and contemplation on the Word in Le Brun's devout circle. Nicolas de Poilly's engraving after Le Brun's composition backs up this hypothesis [Fig. 4.8]. As a matter of fact, eliminating Ann, Elizabeth, and Zachariah, the

18 Jouin H., *Charles Le Brun et les arts sous Louis XIV* 86–87. On Jean-Jacques Olier, see Vidal M. (ed.), *Jean-Jacques Olier: homme de talent, serviteur de l'Évangile (1608–1657)* (Paris: 2009).

19 Gibieuf G., *La vie et les grandeurs de la tres-sainte Vierge Marie, Mere de Dieu, En deux parties, seconde partie* (Paris: 1637) 316. Guillaume Gibieuf, priest of the Oratory, paraphrases Pierre de Bérulle's thoughts, and so suggests how important he was in seventeenth-century France.

20 Saint-Jure J.-B., *De la connoissance et de l'amour du fils de Dieu Nostre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (Paris, n.p.: 1636; reprint, Paris, S. Cramoisy: 1645) 758 (1st ed. 1636). Significantly, these lines are taken from the ninth section of Book III, entitled "De la Mortification de la Langue".



FIGURE 4.8 *Nicolas de Poilly, after Charles Le Brun, The Silence (ca. 1675–1693). Engraving.*
PRIVATE COLLECTION.

engraving focuses even more resolutely on the silence of the Child, who is surrounded only by Mary, Joseph, and John the Baptist; moreover, the print is enriched by a quote from Habakkuk: ‘Sileat omnis terra a facie eius’ (‘Let all the earth be silent before the face of Jesus’). Since Le Brun supervised the production of engravings after his own compositions, it seems likely that he approved the choice of this quote, or even chose it himself.²¹ In light of the engraving and of contemporary theology, Le Brun’s *Sleep of the Child* can be seen to invite the

21 I owe this observation to Christian Michel, Professor of Art History, University of Lausanne.

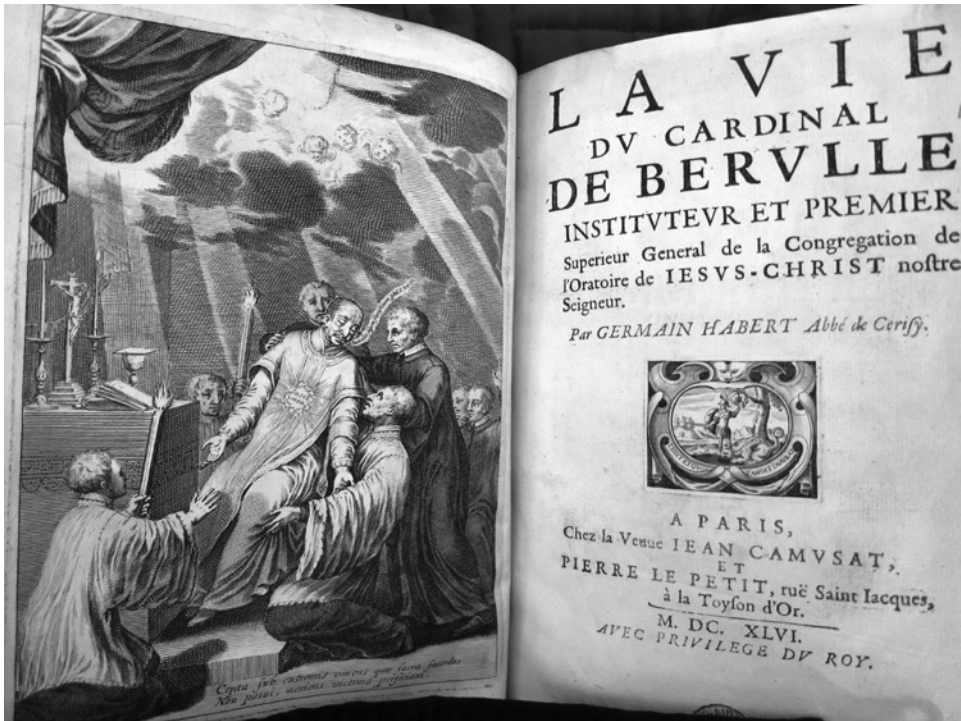


FIGURE 4.9 Charles Le Brun, *La mort du Cardinal de Bérulle pendant l'office* (ca. 1644). Engraving to *La vie du Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle instituteur et premier Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de l'Oratoire de IESUS-CHRIST nostre Seigneur* par GERMAIN HABERT, Abbé de Cerisy (Paris, Jean Camusat et Pierre Le Petit: 1646), frontispiece.
PRIVATE COLLECTION.

viewer silently to engage in contemplation on the mystery of the Incarnation.²² Yet, its insistence on silence, as emphasized in the very title given by Nivelon during the second half of the seventeenth century, has a deeper meaning evocative of this great mystery's Ineffability, as suggested by Bérulle's reflections:

22 On the meditative functions of Images in the early modern Period, see Fumaroli M., *L'école du silence. Le sentiment des images au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1994) 183–186. Also see Cousinié F., *Le peintre chrétien: théories de l'image religieuse dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 2000); Melion W.S., *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: 2009); Enenkel K.A.E. – Melion W.S. (eds.), *Meditatio—Refashioning the Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual Culture* (Leiden: 2011); and Melion W.S. – Guiderdoni A. – Dekoninck R. (eds.), *Ut Pictura Meditatio. The Meditative Image in Northern Art, 1500–1700* (Turnhout: 2012).

Mystère si élevé qu'il surpasse la hauteuse de toutes les pensées des hommes et des anges ; mystère si excellent qu'il comprend Dieu et le monde ensemble dedans soi-même ; mystère si profond qu'il est caché de toute éternité dans la plus secrète pensée de l'Ancien des jours (*Daniel* 7:13) et dans le sein propre du Père éternel, d'une manière si haute et si ineffable, que le grand apôtre le nomme à bon droit, en divers lieux, *le mystère caché de toute éternité en Dieu qui a créé toutes choses* (*Eph.* 3:9 et *Col.* 1:26) [...]. C'est en mystère que l'Eglise doit être saintement et divinement occupée et la piété des âmes plus élevées, ravie d'étonnement et d'admiration, contemplant cet objet auquel on découvre et on aperçoit, en une manière ineffable, la majesté de la divine essence, la distinction de ses personnes, la profondeur de ses conseils et l'éminence, la rareté, la singularité que Dieu a voulu être en cet unique ouvrage [...]. Divin mystère qui est comme le centre de l'être créé et incréé, l'unique sujet auquel Dieu a voulu, et voulu pour jamais, comprendre et réduire au petit pied le monde et soi-même, c'est-à-dire son infinité propre et la grandeur de l'univers ensemble.²³

To Bérulle, the silence of the Virgin also suggests the powerlessness of words to explain the mystery of Incarnation. His *reflexion* emphasizes the ineffability and the incomprehensibility of this mystery, so extraordinary that it cannot be encompassed, let alone summarized, by any language or by human reason. In the painting, the shadows falling upon the slumbering Child's head and naked, inviolate body, along with the silence in which he is immersed, have the effect of distancing the divine figure from the beholder. By plunging the Child's head and leg into darkness, a device that turns his retreating shape into an analogy for the transcendent and indiscernible presence of the divine Word, Le Brun expresses pictorially the inexpressible nature of the divinity hidden in the flesh of Christ, the potentiality of which has still to be fulfilled in the Passion and glorified in the Resurrection. These pictorial devices, combined with the silent atmosphere, describe the inability of words—which have a fundamentally dividing and defining nature—to evoke the Incarnation, which consists in a supernatural conjugation of the human and the divine. The Virgin's gesture indicates that any word would be improper and would awaken the

23 The very title of Bérulle's book, published in Paris in 1629, underlines the deep link between ineffability and Incarnation: see *Discours de l'estat et des grandeurs de Jésus par l'union ineffable de la divinité avec l'humanité*, in Bérulle P. de, *Œuvres complètes* 7. *Discours de l'état des grandeurs de Jésus*, ed. M. Dupuy (Paris: 1996) 68–69; also see vol. 1, "Discours I De l'excellence et singularité du sacré mystère de l'Incarnation".

sleeping Child. And besides, the subject of the painting itself does not have any literary or scriptural source.²⁴ This obvious reluctance of the painting to invoke the word was probably inspired by negative theology. Developed by Dionysius the Aeropagite, who did not believe in the capacity of language to bring the believer to God, negative theology was very popular in seventeenth-century France. Dionysius the Aeropagite was at the time considered a 'national saint' and confused with Denis of Paris—indeed Étienne Binet wrote a biographical account of him in 1642, and earlier, in 1608, his works were issued in a new French translation. In this special context, peculiar to France, the best attitude toward God and his Incarnation was seen to consist in silence:

L'hymne et la louange qui convient proprement à la grandeur de Dieu, est une louange non de paroles, mais d'un profond silence. Ce qui convient ainsi à Dieu et à la religion, peut être justement appliqué à ce très haut, très grand, très sacré mystère de l'Incarnation ; car en son état et son étendue, il enclôt Dieu même ; il établit en l'univers une religion perpétuelle et universelle tout ensemble ; il est la consommation des desseins et des conseils de Dieu sur les enfants des hommes [...] La grandeur, donc, et la sublimité de ce très haut mystère devraient être adorées par un sacré silence et non profanées par nos pensées et nos paroles; et nous devrions imiter la modestie et retenue des anges qui se couvrent et se voilent à la vue d'un si divin objet, et demeurent avec étonnement et admiration en voyant sa gloire. [...] Touchés d'un si rare sujet capable de rendre l'éloquence même muette, [nous] devrions avoir recours à l'éloquence des œuvres et des services, louant, aimant et adorant JC notre Seigneur de toute notre puissance, et le suppliant que tout le cours de notre vie lui soit, à jamais, une dévote et continuelle action de grâces et un perpétuel tribut et hommage de servitude. Ce serait mon désir de demeurer en silence et ça a été mon dessein jusques à présent. [...] Et c'est un des effets sacrés et divins du silence de Jésus, de mettre la très-sainte Mère de Jésus en une vie de silence ; silence humble, profond et adorant plus saintement et plus disertement la sagesse incarnée, que les paroles ni des hommes ni des anges [...].²⁵

24 Bérulle simply quotes a verse from Luke 2:19: 'But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.' See Bérulle, *Œuvres complètes* I. [...] *Œuvres de piété*, ed. Dupuy, 153.

25 Bérulle, "Discours I. De l'excellence et singularité du sacré mystère de l'Incarnation", in *Œuvres complètes* VII. *Discours de l'état des grandeurs de Jésus*, vol. 1 69–71.

Ce sacré silence est plus propre à honorer choses si grandes et si profondes et à révéler dignement les grandeurs de Jésus cachées en ses bassesses, sa divinité voilée de notre humanité, et sa puissance et sagesse incréée, couverte de l'impuissance et de l'enfance que nos yeux aperçoivent [...] aussi est-ce le partage de la Vierge en ce saint temps, d'être en silence. C'est son état, c'est sa voie, c'est sa vie. Sa vie est une vie de silence qui adore la parole éternelle [...]. Ce silence de la Vierge n'est pas un silence de bégaiement et d'impuissance, c'est un silence de lumières et de ravissement, c'est un silence plus éloquent, dans les louanges de Jésus, que l'éloquence même. C'est un effet puissant et divin dans l'ordre de la grâce, c'est-à-dire c'est un silence opéré par le silence de Jésus, qui imprime ce divin effet en sa Mère, et qui la tire à soi dans son propre silence, et qui absorbe en sa divinité toute parole et pensée de sa créature [...].²⁶

In the painting, the Virgin's mute attitude and silent gesture allude to the inability of words adequately to explain the divinity of Jesus or the ineffability of the Incarnation. More than a commonplace of maternal tenderness, this fascinating gesture serves to indicate the unspoken or, better, unspeakable nature of Jesus: he is portrayed paradoxically as a radiant yet shadowy presence, wreathed in silence, the very image of ineffable divinity, which the light of human understanding can never entirely grasp, even in this ordinary setting chosen by Le Brun to suggest the humanity of the holy Family. This juxtaposition of allusions to the humanity and divinity of Christ sets up a tension evocative of the mystery of the Incarnation, making it partially visible and apprehensible to the viewer, who can discern, if not fully understand, how the extraordinary—the divine and untouchable figure of Christ, his head encompassed by shadow—dwells in the ordinary—the familial scene of domestic life—and exceeds the contradiction between human and divine, thanks to the synthetic power of the mystery. It would seem that by painting a slumbering and shadowed Child, beheld but not handled by the conspicuously silent figures surrounding him, Le Brun found a way of indicating how divinity, ineffable by its very nature, is here miraculously conjoined to humanity, in a conjunction visually sensible and yet inaccessible to word and speech. The absence of scopic exchanges between the viewer and the characters in the picture serves to emphasize that this *sacra conversazione* is the privileged domain of the holy figures, according to the formula of St. Paul, who states in *Philippians*

26 Bérulle, "De la naissance et enfance de Jésus", in *Œuvres complètes* 3. [...] *Œuvres de piété*, ed. Dupuy, 152.

3:20 that 'our conversation [viz., union with Christ] is in heaven', not on earth. The removal of the viewer in the Louvre composition is a way of insisting that the mystery of the Incarnation, even if it has a human and ordinary aspect, remains essentially beyond human thought and speech.

The Fertile Muteness of Painting: Towards a 'Mute Theology'

Nivelon merely pointed to the narrative relationship between the thematic of silence and the portrayal of Christ, his divinity partly hidden in shadow. He also mentioned in passing the picture's delicate spirituality, using the metaphor of 'Attic and precious salt'. I have tried to indicate what he meant by considering Le Brun's composition in light of theological treatises, such as Bérulle's, that circulated within his devout circle. Indeed, as I have already argued, the work's main pictorial features (chiaroscuro, arrangement and gestures of the figures, placement of the Child in silent and dark isolation at a certain remove from the viewer) visibly connote the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation, turning it into the mute subject of silent contemplation.

It is likely that the Louvre painting, by attending to the depiction of silence, also crystallized a long artistic quest which Le Brun would verbalize sixteen years later, in a *conférence* (10 January 1671) on Poussin's *Ecstasy of Saint Paul*:

Messieurs, nous avons tâché de faire entendre dans les assemblées précédentes combien de choses étaient nécessaires aux peintres, mais l'on ne s'était point encore imaginé qu'ils eussent une théologie muette et que, par leurs figures, ils fissent connaître les mystères les plus cachés de notre religion. Néanmoins, cela n'est pas nouveau. Les Égyptiens, les Grecs et les Romains n'ont pas ignoré cette belle partie ; toute leur théologie était représentée sous des figures que les peintres et les sculpteurs avaient inventées. [...] Cette partie toute spirituelle [de la peinture] où chaque figure cache autant de mystères [...] ²⁷

Thanks to such pictorial devices as the Virgin's gesture and the selective *chiaroscuro*, the *Sleep of the Child* can be construed as an early attempt to represent the 'mute theology' for which he continued to search, having once located it at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation. The obvious avoidance of words

27 Le Brun C., "Conférence sur le Ravissement de saint Paul du 10 janvier 1671", in Lichtenstein J. – Michel C. (eds.), *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, tome 1* (Paris: 2006) 395.

and the tribute paid to silence may be clues to the artist's deeply reflexive and metapictorial consciousness, given that painting was considered a form 'mute poetry', according to the dictum of Simonides de Ceos.²⁸ As a painter and founding member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, Le Brun was of course very concerned with the nonverbal semantics of painting and with discursive modes of visual expression, as suggested by his personal investigations into the expression of the passions and his numerous academic *conferences*. Through the gesture of the Virgin, Le Brun's *Silence* appears to evince with great specificity how the suggestive power of painting, in its muteness, differs from that of the word.

It might even be said about the *Silence* that the painting 'takes revenge' on the word, decorously expressing the ineffability peculiar to religious mysteries—in this case, the Incarnation—precisely thanks to its muteness. The silence that characterizes the painting turns out to be an advantage because, as a writer close to Le Brun's main patron, the Jesuit Étienne Binet, put it, words can neither describe nor give an account of the wholeness of divinity:

[...] l'éloquence est bonne pour relever les petites choses : mais aux choses infiniment relevées, *il faut que le silence nous serve d'éloquence*. Jamais on ne dit mieux les choses grandes, que quand on fait profession de ne les pouvoir dire.²⁹

In the case of Le Brun's *Silence*, painting succeeds in converting its fundamental handicap, its muteness, into an asset perfectly adapted to the 'subject' of the painting: 'the unspeakable mystery of the Incarnation' (Binet).

Poussin, who described the task of a painter as a 'profession de choses muettes'³⁰ and was Le Brun's mentor in Rome, conveys the same idea in his correspondence, and celebrates the nonverbal and suggestive power of painting:

28 The aphorism, 'Painting is mute Poetry, and Poetry a speaking painting', is quoted by Plutarch in "On the Fame of Athenians", in *Moralia* v.1; cf. *Œuvres Morales*, v, *première partie*, eds.-trans. R. Klaerr – A. Philippon – J. Sirinelli (Paris: 1990) 109–110. Plutarch attributes the aphorism to the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos, on which see Fumaroli M., *L'Âge de l'éloquence* (Geneva: 2002) xii; and Christin A.-M., *L'invention de la figure, "Visible, lisible"* (Paris: 2011) 21–126.

29 Binet Étienne, *Le grand chef-d'œuvre de Dieu et les souveraines perfections de la sainte Vierge sa Mere* (Paris, Leb. Chapelet: 1634; reprint, Paris, M. Hauteville: 1648) 131.

30 Letter from Nicolas Poussin to Sublet des Noyers dated 20th February 1639. See Jouanny C., "Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin", *Archives de l'art français* v (Paris: 1911) 16.

quelquefois les muettes Images apendues à un temple par les hommes ne sont pas moins agréables à dieu que les psalmes éloquens chantés par les prebtres. Ainsi j'espère que vostre b nignit  trouuera aussi agr ables mes tacites Images comme lui sont les facondes Louanges de qui les s ait faire.³¹

This range of testimonies in Le Brun's circle supports the further hypothesis that his *Silence* constitutes an apology for the mute image, particularly for its capacity, beyond that of any other medium, to ascertain or, better, to infer the unspeakable nature of the divinity that lies concealed under the veil of Christ's human flesh.

In Le Brun's *Sleep of the Child*, the silent spirituality of the Incarnation finally appears to derive from an aristocratic conception of the Image, which ceases to function mainly as a simple means of mass education, as a certain reading of Gregory the Great's dictum would have it. In this French and Catholic context, the art of painting is no longer seen as referring to an edifying religious text: it supplants the word and constitutes a kind of introduction to higher meditation on the Incarnation that borrows its substance from negative theology. Because it is mute, the image becomes the privileged place where a mystical ethos of silence comes more fully into consciousness, and a potential handicap instead becomes a desirable instrument of devotion. Exiled from the spoken word, Le Brun's *Silence* certifies other channels of piety, and assists the devout viewer to dwell on one of the most impenetrable Christian mysteries, no less efficiently than do scriptural and exegetical texts. The image, in its silent perfection, becomes a 'thought in painting' (to quote C zanne), its meaningful portrayal of Christ the Word Incarnate surpassing what words can convey.

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31 Letter from Nicolas Poussin to Sublet des Noyers dated 10th April 1641. See *ibidem* 54.

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PART 2

Imago Dei and the Incarnate Word



Thomas Aquinas, Sacramental Scenes, and the ‘Aesthetics’ of Incarnation

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Modern accounts of Thomas Aquinas’s ‘aesthetics’ often invoke two short passages from the first part of his *Summa of Theology*.¹ The more familiar passage reports that beauty requires three things: first, *integritas* or *perfectio*, wholeness or completeness; second, *debita proportio* or *consonantia*, due proportion or harmony; and third, *claritas*, by which Thomas means something like luminosity or vividness, giving as his example a bright color (1.39.8).² The other classic passage comes even earlier in the *Summa* (1.5.4 ad 1). In it, Thomas argues that the beautiful and the good are the same ‘in subject’ (*in subjecto*) though they differ ‘in notion’ (*ratione*). Since Thomas counts the good as a universal attribute of being, many modern readers conclude that beauty too must also be universal.

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- 1 The best known of these accounts may be the one given by Stephen Daedalus in Joyce J., *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. H.W. Gabler and W. Hettche (New York: 1993), 239. The scholarly commentary on the *Summa*’s passages on beauty is both voluminous and contentious, but much of it agrees in situating them within a history of ‘aesthetics’. Consider some of the most frequently cited interpretations of the last half century or so: Kovach F., *Die Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse* (Berlin: 1961), throughout; Eco U., *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d’Aquino*, 2d edition (Milan: 1970), especially Chapter 4; Perpeet W., *Ästhetik im Mittelalter* (Freiburg – Munich: 1977), 91–92; Tatarkiewicz W., *Geschichte der Ästhetik, 2: Die Ästhetik des Mittelalters* (Basel – Stuttgart: 1980), 278, 282–86; Nichols A., *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Aldershot and Burlington: 2007), 11–17.
 - 2 Parenthetical references are to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, according to the version established by the ‘Leonine’ edition: *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII. P.M. edita*, vols. 4–12 (Rome: 1888–1906). I cite passages according to the *Summa*’s own textual divisions: the part, the question, the article, and the component within the article. (I will also follow the textual divisions of the Leonine edition when citing other works by Thomas.)—Here I note an interesting variation in the manuscript tradition. Three manuscripts read ‘colorem nitidum’; three others, ‘colorem vividum’. Elsewhere in the *Summa*, Thomas speaks of the *claritas* of fire or of the sun (1.108.5 ad 5, 2–1.67.5 argumentum 2). He relies on the term especially when discussing Christ’s transfiguration (3.45.1–2).

Even if their inference were right, we should still pause before counting these two passages as sufficient to generate a Thomistic aesthetic. To begin with, the passages occur in quite different contexts. The remarks on beauty are asides in treatments of quite different topics. Moreover, the passages are not particularly original. In them, Thomas rehearses common-place formulas from his teacher, Albert the Great.³ Finally, and most importantly, these passages do not prove that beauty is the fundamental category through which Thomas thinks about artifacts or events that are striking because of their ordered vivacity, their compelling manifestation.

If the two passages on beauty cannot underwrite a Thomist aesthetic, they do offer something more interesting: they give clues to the range of terms that figure prominently in Thomas's theology of manifestation. So the first passage applies each of the notes of beauty to the Trinitarian person of the Son, who is of the same nature as the Father (*integritas*), who is the expressed image of the Father (*proportio*), and who is the Father's Word (*claritas*). The juxtaposition here of expression, image, word, and *claritas* itself should remind readers to look in the *Summa* for a network of terms that are used to describe the connections among words and visual manifestations.

Imago

"Image" is one of the central terms in the *Summa*'s lexicon. Its importance is too obvious to be missed. In the prologue to the second or moral part of the *Summa*, Thomas explains his basic arrangement of topics.

Since, as [John] Damascene says, the human being is said to be made in the *image* of God so far as 'image' signifies intellectual [capacity] and free choice and having power over oneself; after what has already been said concerning the *exemplar*, namely God, and what proceeds from divine power according to God's will; it remains that we consider God's *image*, that is, the human being. (2-1 prologus, emphasis added)

In short, the *Summa* is built around the relation of image to exemplar. Indeed, the conception of image is much more central to Thomas's thinking than the

3 See especially Albert, *Super De div. nom.*, cap. 4, in the Cologne edition of the *Opera Omnia*, vol. 37/1, ed. P. Simon (Munster: 1972), 181-182, 185, 187. Albert composed this work while Thomas was his student.

notion of beauty, however much he seems to imply that beauty is a universal feature of being.

If a reader proceeds from this salient use of image to others in the *Summa*, she will find that they occur mostly in its first part, in the discussion of God and creatures.⁴ Thomas elaborates technical meanings of 'image' in dealing with Trinitarian persons or processions (the Son as image of the Father) and in dealing with both angels and human beings as *imago Dei*, the image of God.⁵ These theologically freighted uses of the notion of image give it what might be called an ontological connotation. The theologically primary uses of 'image' refer not to artistic representations or even mental ones, but to the being of a Trinitarian person and of rational creatures. Thomas talks about images elsewhere, of course and with other meanings. He does so most extensively when treating the use and abuse of religious artworks, including depictions of Jesus Christ.⁶ But the center of gravity for the teaching about images in the *Summa* is to be found in the first part's discussions of Trinitarian relations and the creation of angels and human beings.

Does this mean that Thomas abandons an interest in vivid manifestation as he proceeds into the rest of the *Summa*? It does not. Thomas appeals to concepts of manifestation throughout, but especially in the *Summa*'s third part, which treats of the incarnation and its continuation in sacraments. There he tends to replace image with other notions, less fixed theologically and less ontological in their meanings.⁷

Convenientia

The third part of the *Summa of Theology* is Thomas's last major work. He broke off writing, in the middle of the consideration of the sacraments, after he had a vision. The text we do have tells us that the third part, once complete, would

4 According to the search functions of the *Index Thomisticus*, 400 of the *Summa*'s 587 mentions of 'imago' or its inflected forms fall in the *prima pars*.

5 For the notion of image in Trinitarian contexts, see especially *Summa theol.* 1.34–35 and 1.45. For angels and human beings as images of God, see especially 1.56,59 and (most extensively) 1.93.

6 For remarks on idolatry, see especially *Summa theol.* 2–1.100.4, 2–2.81.3 ad 3, and 2–2.94.1. For worship of images of Christ, see 3.25.3–4.

7 I stress that this is a judgment of relative frequency. The notion of image still appears at some important moments in the *Summa*'s third part. For example, the divine adoption of human beings is understood as a 'certain natural conformation to the image of the son of God' (3.45.4 corpus).

have treated Jesus as Savior, his sacraments, and the immortal life that comes in rising from the dead with him (*Summa* 3 prologus). Thomas had of course treated these large topics in earlier works, but he had not treated them in this order. The order is significant. To the question, How are incarnation, gospel narrative, and sacraments related?, the *Summa* answers by appealing to a logic of vivid enactment.

Thomas was trained under an order of theological topics drawn from Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. That creedal pattern pushes the Christian sacraments to a fourth and final book, to the doctrine of signs rather than things. The sacraments are thus separated structurally from arguments about the incarnation's appropriateness. By contrast, the structure of the third Part of Thomas's *Summa* extends the pedagogy of the incarnation through the narrated life of Christ into the sacraments. What ties together incarnation, gospel narrative, and sacraments is a notion of manifestation that is described not with the freighted term *imago*, but with the ampler term *convenientia*.

Convenientia is certainly not 'convenience' in the contemporary English sense. Though it often means fittingness or appropriateness, in this part of the *Summa* the Latin term refers typically to pedagogical display. Arguments about *convenientia* are often slighted by contrast with strict demonstration. Elsewhere Thomas himself insists that they lack demonstrative force and ought not to be pressed on unbelievers as if they were strict demonstrations.⁸ If reasoning from *convenientia* is not demonstration, it is still pedagogically necessary for central theological topics. According to Thomas, the most important theological lessons—the lessons about how to attain human happiness—depend on seeing the incarnation as the most appropriate staging of divine teaching.

Thomas's main concern in the third Part of the *Summa* is to show how God took flesh, lived in human history, and instituted continuing sacraments. Each aspect of the incarnation is justified by arguments of *convenientia*. The same is true for each event in Christ's life as narrated by the canonical Gospels. Indeed, the *Summa*'s questions on the metaphysics of the union of divinity with humanity are greatly outnumbered by a meditated re-staging of Christ's life as vivid moral pedagogy. The arguments of *convenientia* do not stop there. They are also supplied for each of the seven sacraments. Earlier in the *Summa*, Thomas relies on Moses Maimonides when he wants to offer detailed readings of Israelite ceremonial law as one stage of a divine teaching (2–1.101–102). In those questions, Thomas argues that apparently arbitrary regulations for

8 See, for example, *Summa contra Gentiles* lib. 1 cap. 9.

ceremony can be understood as part of a rational moral teaching performed over a segment of human history. In the detailed treatment of the Christian sacraments within the *Summa*'s third part, there are similar arguments—indeed, stronger ones, because, to Christian eyes, the burden of demonstration is less, the vividness greater. Thomas wants to show that the sacraments, down to their details, are fully appropriate divine teaching for embodied intelligences afflicted by sin. The teaching is a series of lessons—of staged representations—at once visible and rational.

The interest of these arguments of *convenientia* to a theology of manifestation is strengthened by reflection on their sources. Many of the arguments depend noticeably on Eastern Christian writers. This is not surprising given that Thomas had spent much of the previous decade finding and mastering theological texts from 'the Greeks'. Indeed, Thomas had supervised the compilation of a continuous gloss on the Gospels that translated many Eastern Christian authors into Latin for the first time. He himself uses this gloss to construct arguments about Christ in the *Summa*.⁹ What is not so often noticed is that Thomas also invokes these Eastern sources in the *structure* of the *Summa*'s third part. A pattern of theological teaching that flows from the appropriateness of incarnation, through a narrative of Christ's life (and of his mother's), to the Christian sacraments can be found in several sources, but famously in John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*. It is no coincidence that John is also the renowned defender of icons—or that his central defense of them is a claim that the whole of reality is structured iconically. Nor is it a coincidence, I think, that 'the Damascene' is named in the prologue to the moral part of the *Summa* in order to explain the structure of the whole work.

In the third part of the *Summa*, arguments of *convenientia* gain force by accumulation. Thomas likes to multiply them, offering two or three alternative explanations of why God chose to show something in a particular way. No essay could reproduce their cumulative effect. I can only illustrate Thomas's reasoning about vivid manifestation from two clusters of questions from the third part of the *Summa*. The first cluster considers Christ's nativity, circumcision, and baptism (3.36–38). The second cluster treats the Christian sacraments as such or in kind (3.60–61).

9 Bataillon L.-J., "Saint Thomas et les Pères: De la *Catena* à la *Tertia Pars*," *Ordo sapientiae et amoris: Image et message de saint Thomas d'Aquin à travers les récentes études historiques, herméneutiques et doctrinales: Hommage au professeur Jean-Pierre Torrell OP à l'occasion de son 65^e anniversaire*, ed. C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: 1993), 15–36.

Manifestatio

As the *Summa* meditates on the *convenientia* of the events of Christ's life, it reaches a question about 'the manifestation of the newborn Christ' (3.36). The question concerns the Gospel episode celebrated liturgically as the Epiphany. It defends the coherence and appropriateness of Luke's stories about Bethlehem and the Magi. But the question also leads Thomas to more general principles of divine manifestation. One is the principle that God's incarnation could not be manifested immediately to all human beings without undoing the *ratio fidei*, the progressive pedagogy of faith (3.36.1 corpus). For the incarnation to teach human beings, God incarnate must lead a recognizably human life—beginning as an infant, growing to adulthood. News of the incarnation must also spread in recognizable ways, passing from a few to many. This is a notion of hierarchical transmission but more importantly a claim that the gospel is entrusted to human means of representation.

Thomas justifies many details of the nativity stories as figures of past or future events of salvation history.¹⁰ Some of them prefigure the fuller and more complete proclamations of Christ's teaching (3.36.3 ad 1). Even before the gospel spreads—before preachers are sent out to the world—there are in distant lands indeces (*indicia*) of the incarnation, miraculous but obscure portents (3.36.3 ad 3). Nearer at hand, the event itself is framed by 'visible apparitions' and 'celestial signs' (3.36.5 corpus). The 'complete manifestation' of God incarnate is the goal, but it is always subject to the historical limits of material representation (3.36.4 corpus). Indeed, this incarnate God becomes fully manifest in a human body, not in pure Godhead. So, Thomas says, 'the flesh' of the newborn 'was manifest, but the divinity hidden' (3.36.5 ad 1). Indeed, an angel must appear 'with *claritas*' to point out that this infant is actually the 'splendor of the Father's glory.' The divinely assumed body requires more vivid frames or captions—indeces at some distance, apparitions nearer at hand. These frames or captions are not Brechtian; they are not meant to alienate the viewer. They call rather for closer attention to what might appear as only familiar. In that sense, they might be said to alert the viewer to a surprising nearness of divinity in bodies.

The *Summa*'s next question considers Christ's circumcision. Here Thomas must qualify a principle quoted by one of the first objections: 'When the truth arrives, the figure ceases' (3.37.1 argumentum 1). The objector means to argue that as soon as the incarnation occurs, its anticipations in Jewish ritual can

10 For example, the 'figuring' of Christ's power to judge and the defeat of the devil in 3.36.2 ad 3; the prefiguring of the preaching to the gentiles and the Jews, 3.36.6 corpus; and so on.

no longer bind. Thomas's specific reply is that the new sacramental order is not promulgated until Christ's passion (3.37.1 ad 1). His more general argument is that Christ's circumcision means not only to affirm the truth of his human nature or to honor the Old Law, but to give moral instruction in various other ways (3.37.1 corpus). He makes his own a motto quoted by another objector: 'Christ's every action is our instruction.'¹¹ This motto suggests that moral re-education—which is the end of divine revelation—will take place through contemplative sharing in narrated action. So the modes of theological composition will be modes for representing and reflecting on scenes of instruction.

The relation of action to instruction is confirmed in the third question of this cluster, which treats Jesus's baptism by John. Part of the concern here is the relation of John's baptism both to Israelite rituals and to Christian sacraments. The main argument is that Jesus receives baptism from John in order to set an example (3.39.1 corpus, 2 corpus). This baptism marks the beginning of Jesus's public ministry—of the fuller manifestation of the truth that he is. The beginning is signified in the gospel narratives by the opening of the heavens (*Luke* 3, quoted 3.39.5 sed contra). Thomas considers with some earlier readers the vision that Jesus had as he rose from the waters. What kind of vision was it? Certainly it was a spiritual vision, but it might also be of three other types. It might have been a physical vision, since Jesus was surrounded by splendor. Perhaps it was an imaginative vision, like the prophetic vision of Ezechiel. Finally, it could have been an intellectual vision, by which Christ, having sanctified baptism in accepting it, understood that the heavens were now indeed open for humankind (for all, 3.39.5 ad 2). Thomas does not choose among these possibilities, since the pedagogy of incarnation can compass them all in its abundance of manifestation.

Let me remind you just at this point that I am *not* reading an ekphrasis of a famous image. Thomas is arguing the *convenientia* not of an image but of the revealed narration of what he takes to be an historical event. In these remarks on the opening of the heavens, Thomas recapitulates the whole course of visual instruction in scriptures, but he recalls it at the moment of its completion in

11 The motto that Thomas quotes has a complicated transmission, appearing often in homiletic contexts during the decades before he writes. See, for example, William of Auvergne, *Sermones de sanctis*, sermo 29, on the purification of Mary (ed. F. Morenzoni, vol. 230B, 124, line 4), *Sermones de tempore*, sermon 63, on the octave of the Epiphany (ed. Morenzoni, vol. 230, 237, line 8), and sermon 148, on Palm Sunday (ed. Morenzoni, vol. 230A, 53, line 5). The motto is used by Thomas from his earliest treatments of the sacraments: *Scriptum Sent.* 4 dist. 2 qu. 2 art. 3 qcul. 1 argumentum 2, dist. 4 qu. 3 art. 1 qcul. 2 argumentum 1, dist. 9 qu. 1 art. 5 qcul. 1 sed contra 1, and so on.

the visible ministry of an incarnate God. That ministry was first recorded in words, of course, not images. Still in retelling Jesus' epiphany, circumcision, and baptism, Thomas reminds his readers that the full manifestation of incarnation was not through speeches only, but through deeds—or, rather, through events that contained both words and bodily actions. When it comes time for Jesus to leave his followers, he will not hand over a series of painted images or even an anthology of texts (since he left writing to others). Jesus will institute a series of repetitive events, the performed signs known as sacraments.

The Sacraments

Many readers of Thomas, especially since the Reformation, have been preoccupied to establish what exactly the *Summa* says about sacraments as causes. It is more important to notice that the definition of sacraments and the justification for their divine provision occurs in the *Summa* before any detailed discussion of causality. Indeed, Thomas begins by placing sacraments among signs rather than among causes (3.60.1 argumentum 1 and ad 1). The sacraments are signs first, causes second.

With Augustine, Thomas stresses the perception of the sign. Indeed, he cites other Augustinian phrases that contrast the visibility of sacramental signs with the invisibility of the mysteries they signify.¹² Thomas stresses that 'sensible' and 'visible' things are used as sacramental signs. When one objector argues that sacraments cannot be necessary for salvation because they are concerned only with bodily things, Thomas rebuts the objection while affirming one of its premises (3.61.1 argumentum 1 and ad 1). The sacraments do require bodily motions, and they do achieve their effects through sensible things—though their effects are not confined to the physical.

If sacramental effects exceed natural causality, they do not contradict what human minds know of it. Indeed, their efficacy—which is their pedagogy—is

12 Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.60.1 sed contra, 'the visible sacrifice is the sacrament of the invisible sacrifice', after Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10.5; 3.60.6 argumentum 1, 'for what are other bodily sacraments if not certain visible words (*verba visibilia*)', after Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 19.16; 3.61.1 sed contra, 'human beings cannot be united in anything called religion, whether true or false, unless they are held together by some sharing of visible signs or sacraments (*signaculorum vel sacramentorum visibilia*)', after Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 19.11. Supporting the emphases on visibility is a definition of sign as perceptible: 'beyond the species that [a sign] presses on the senses, it makes something else come into cognition' (3.60.1 argumentum 2; compare 3.60.4 corpus). The definition is taken from Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.1.1.

dictated by human nature. It is 'connatural' for human minds to learn through sensation, from sensible things (3.60.4 corpus). The human ability to read physical signs does not stand over against sacramental causality. The classic definition of the sacrament is that it is a holy sign that causes what it signifies. As Thomas will argue at great length for each sacramental rite, the natural signification of things and gestures aligns with the spiritual effects.

The importance of this alignment requires that the sacraments not be mute performances. On Thomas's account, natural signification is too ambiguous for the sacraments to rely on things or gestures alone. Their meanings must be specified by words. This is the principle we have already seen at work in his explanation of the framing of the nativity. The truth of incarnation requires that Jesus be born as a human baby and that news of the birth travel within human channels, through the human history of reports and representations. Still an angelic announcement—or at least miraculous indeces and portents—are supplied to show that this infant flesh does indeed hide divinity. How is the reader to understand this relation so that it does not eclipse bodies in words—or else render bodies superfluous to an essentially verbal instruction?

Thomas captures the relation of words to gestures or things in a sacrament by a later infamous use of the distinction between form and matter (3.60.6 ad 2). The words in a sacramental rite are like its form, he says; the things and gestures, like the matter. This is an analogy—the point cannot be repeated often enough given later controversies. It is an analogy sustained by the incarnational logic that grounds sacramental power. Material forms are typically bound to their matter, but in this case especially, since to deprecate or to deny the matter of a sacrament is to deny the reality of incarnation. The sacraments are recollections or reiterations of the principle of their sanctifying cause, who is the incarnate Word. They are images that alter matter. In the Eucharistic memorial, the priest 'carries the image of Christ (*gerit imaginem Christi*), in whose person and power he pronounces the words of consecration' (3.81.3 3.1 ad 3).

Just here a reader reaches what is most striking about Thomas's notion of vivid manifestation—namely, that its central instances are material events. The importance of the event may be approached along at least two ways. First, on Thomas's account, the causal power of Christian sacraments depends not on incarnation abstractly, but on a particular episode of Jesus's life, namely the passion. Sacraments are efficacious signs because they are re-performances of an event, which was itself the culmination of the incarnation as a sequence of divine teaching. The divine teaching of the New Law is not principally a text or a static picture. It is a sequence of actions that must be repeated as actions for the divine teaching to attain its goal. Again, to take the second approach,

Thomas typically understands words within events rather than as free-floating propositions or commands. If the words that matter most to his understanding of divine teaching are not always performatives in the strictest Austinian sense, they are performances, and they have their full effect—which is their consequential meaning—in relation to bodies.

The notion of manifestation as action appears most clearly in such reflections on the sacraments, but not only in them. Already in that famous invocation of the *imago Dei* to explain the structure of the *Summa*, Thomas had emphasized that the divine image consists in a certain capacity for action. The human being is the image of God so far as the human being can act. In the questions on the sacraments, the reader is now told that human action is healed when it is reformed not only according to the example of Jesus's life but through repeated enactments of a culminating event. The re-enactments are occasions of grace; they are also prompts to habituation. Here a reader may see the most interesting connection between the teaching on incarnation or sacraments and the presuppositions of the *Summa's* moral part. When Thomas chooses to organize moral teaching around the virtues rather than around commandments or counsels, he shifts moral instruction from learning rules to imitating events. Virtues in Thomas are learned by practice—or by grace that issues in practice. The unit of moral pedagogy is an embodied scene of instruction, not a rule. The most complete art is neither painting nor verbal narration, but their combination into a kind of theater—that is, a liturgy.

The *Summa* and the Rhetoric of Representation

Sketching these largest connections quickly, I hope to have suggested how important vivid manifestation of action is to the project of the *Summa*. That project is Thomas's best rendering of his understanding of the whole of Christian theology. On his account, in his very compositional structures, both incarnation and image have, at their center, a notion of the manifesting event. That notion—rather than the notes of beauty—is the starting-point of a characteristically Thomist account of the importance of manifestation. The beauties that human arts reach are important to Thomas because they both reflect and lead towards the more intense beauties of life with God. 'Every creature is a certain darkness if it is compared to the immensity of divine *claritas*' (1.112.3 corpus). A reader would hardly expect Thomas to say otherwise. Of course, the reader should then recall that Thomas says it in order to lead the reader toward that greater brightness.

The frankly hortatory intention of Thomas's theological writing suggests that the attempt to find or make a Thomist aesthetics may be a category mistake—if by 'aesthetics' we mean to separate off a sphere of experiences or objects for disinterested explanation. The most critical question raised by attempts at a Thomist 'aesthetics' is not about the need for historical hypotheses to fill in the very limited textual evidence.¹³ The critical question attaches rather to the assumption that Thomas's remarks on beauty, whatever their extent, could be extracted from their contexts and reconstituted as an 'aesthetics' in some modern sense. I have argued that they cannot—in part because 'beauty' is only one subordinate term in a larger lexicon, in part because the whole lexicon can only be understood within Thomas's theological purposes. Thomas uses 'beauty' and more fundamental terms like 'image' and 'manifestation' as elements of a divine pedagogy that draws human beings towards their moral end.

It might be more helpful for modern readers of Thomas to set aside the category of the 'aesthetic' altogether in favor of others. They might look instead for the rational rhetoric of images in Thomas—or the art of persuasion through events of manifestation. They might then recall that all such notions are encompassed by the venerable term under which Thomas opens the *Summa: sacra doctrina*, holy teaching (1.1.1). That term names the human share of a divine teaching that culminates in an incarnation.

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The Poetics of the Image in Late Medieval Mysticism

Niklaus Largier

Incarnation, imagination, and image are key words in late medieval German Dominican theology and mysticism.¹ In the writings of the so-called German mystics Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Heinrich Seuse, the birth of God is the theological notion and concept that brings all three terms into focus. More precisely, it is the birth of God in the soul that is the focus of all creation, of all coming forth as an image, and of the very nature of God's creativity. Thus, Eckhart writes: 'God's chief aim is giving birth. He is never content till He begets His Son in us. And the soul, too, is in no way content until the Son of God is born in her.'

He explains further:

This [the birth] cannot be received by creatures in which God's image is not found, for the soul's image appertains especially to this eternal birth, which happens truly and especially in the soul, being begotten of the Father in the soul's ground and innermost recesses, into which no image ever shone or power of the soul was able to look.

And, going on with his explanation, Eckhart expresses an overarching tension between image and iconoclasm, imagination (*bilde, bildunge*) and disimagination (*entbilden*):

Therefore you have to be and dwell in the essence and in the ground, and there will God touch you with His simple essence without the intervention of any image. No image represents and signifies itself: it always aims and points to that of which it is the image [...]. And therefore there must be silence and a stillness, and the Father must speak in that, and give birth to his Son, and perform his works free from all images.²

1 For an overview see McGinn B., *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: 2005).

2 Meister Eckhart, *German Sermons and Treatises*, ed. M.O.C. Walshe, 3 vols. (London and Dulverton: 1979–1985), II 157–162. German text of this sermon: Meister Eckhart, *Werke*, ed. N. Largier, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a. M.: 1993), I 132–141.

As we can see from these quotes and from many other passages in Eckhart's works, his understanding of the incarnation is intimately linked to both, the coming forth of and as an image,³ the very creation of all things, and the overcoming of the fallen state of the creation and of man in a form of apophatic dis-imagination (*entbilden*). According to Eckhart, only the soul that frees itself from all determination through images is open to the birth of God in its very ground. It is in this convergence of a freedom from images and the incarnation that mankind in its saved state moves beyond all representational and signifying function of images back into an originary immanence of divine creativity—where both man and creation come forth again as free images.

I

Building on a range of theological traditions and on the strong influence of the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, this reformulation of the concept of incarnation is not really surprising. It is, in its core, a reinterpretation of the idea that Mary's soul was ready to give birth to God insofar as she was like an empty, 'immaculate mirror' (*speculum sine macula*, *Wisdom* 7:26). In this pure and immaculate state Mary is seen as the exemplary figure who was able to receive the divine in her flesh and mirror it back into God and into the world. The figure of Mary became thus one of the paradigms for the convergence of incarnation theology and speculative mysticism.⁴ On this basis Meister Eckhart puts a strong emphasis on the freedom from representational image and the rebirth as a free image, that is: on the fact that the incarnation—as the birth of God in the soul—is at the same time the apophatic liberation from all 'alien' images,⁵ the creation of mankind and the world in God's image, and the restoration of the very forthcoming of creation as a 'free' image beyond all representation in the pure immanence of the birth of Christ.⁶

It must be emphasized here, as well, that Eckhart and his followers understand the incarnation not primarily as a historical event and as an eschatological promise but as something that we could describe as the very structure of the soul in relation to itself, the world, and God. Thus, in their theory of

3 Haas A.M., *Sermo mysticus* (Freiburg: 1979) 209–237.

4 See Largier N., "Spiegelungen: Fragmente einer Geschichte der Spekulation", *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. New series* 3 (1999) 616–636.

5 Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, ed. O. Davies (London: 1994) 158.

6 For Eckhart's notion of immanence see Dubilet A., *Kenosis and Immanence: Self-Emptying in Eckhart, Hegel and Bataille* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2014).

the birth of god, i.e., the birth of god in the soul, they formulate a theory of unity with the divine that thinks redemption in terms of coming forth from the divine here, now, and at all times. This coming-forth in unity has to be uncovered through a praxis that Eckhart understands as ‘becoming-a-virgin’, a notion that he explores in terms of detachment and dis-imagination (*entbilden*) with a strong focus on the apophatic removal of all images from the surface and the depths of the soul. Thus, he writes in a sermon dedicated to a reading of *Luke* 10:38: ‘Now note the fact that it has to be a “virgin” who receives him. “Virgin” means someone who is free of all alien images, as free in fact as that person was before he or she existed.’⁷ Explaining more thoroughly what he means by that, Eckhart applies the trope of the virgin to Jesus and develops a new understanding of the convergence between a contemplative and an active life, between Mary and Martha, and between man and God:

I say further that the fact that someone is a virgin does not take anything away from the works they have done but rather leaves them free and virginal, unhindered with respect to the highest truth, just as Jesus is empty and free and virginal in himself. We too must be virgins if we are to receive the virginal Jesus since, in the view of the learned, the foundation of union is the meeting of like and like.⁸

For Eckhart, this return into a state of virginity is supported by a practice of detachment, an elimination of images, and a liberation of the intellect. Thus, intellect turns into the pure possibility to become everything and to share the divine creativity where soul and intellect are not determined by anything else. Thus, Eckhart reinterprets the idea of the incarnation through the prism of the virgin birth in a speculative way, privileging the emphasis on the very freedom of the intellect as the place of pure receptivity, divine immanence, and creative unfolding in a spontaneous procession of non-alienated images.⁹

⁷ Eckhart, *Selected Writings* 158.

⁸ Ibidem 159.

⁹ For two opposing interpretations of the procession of images in Eckhart, compare Flasch K., “Procedere ut imago. Das Hervorgehen des Intellekts aus seinem göttlichen Grund bei Meister Dietrich, Meister Eckhart und Berthold von Moosburg”, in Ruh K. (ed.), *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: 1986) 125–134; and Largier N., “Negativität, Möglichkeit, Freiheit: Zur Differenz zwischen der Philosophie Dietrichs von Freiberg und Meister Eckharts”, in Kandler K.-H. et al. (eds.), *Dietrich von Freiberg: Neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft* (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: 1999) 149–168.

II

Eckhart's student Henry Suso, on the other side, explains this very path of removal and of rejoining the creativity of the divine ground explicitly in terms of a specific investment of the soul in the world of images. While Eckhart insists on the purely negative and apophatic moves that focus on an engagement with images in which all images, concepts, and words are to be negated in order to uncover the inner unity of mankind and the divine in the birth of god in the nameless ground of the soul, Suso emphasizes a quite specific engagement with image-making and—more generally—practices of figuration. In doing so, Suso draws on Eckhart's negative theology, on his idea of detachment, and of the free ground of the soul, but he also reaffirms explicitly both the status of images in the world and of affects and sensations that are to be aroused by the images. Engaging in a discussion with Meister Eckhart, he turns against the latter's strong intellectualist iconoclasm and, as I see it, continues a tradition of contemplative prayer¹⁰ against another school of readers of Eckhart, possibly represented by the collection of sermons called *Paradisus anime intelligentis*.¹¹

In other words, in the writings and discussions of these late medieval theologians the understanding of the incarnation turns into the very place of a specific evaluation and negotiation of the status of the image and, as I will demonstrate further based on the writings of Eckhart's student Henry Suso, of a specific understanding of a poetics of figuration. 'Bare figure' in the title of my essay refers thus not only to the representation of the incarnation in the figure of Christ on the cross (*Ecce homo*) but, more specifically, to Suso's attempt to move beyond Eckhart's apophatic challenge and its intellectualist emphasis. Instead of Eckhart's negation of all images, figures, and thoughts in view of a divine unity of receptivity and productivity of the soul, Suso seems to be invested in thinking the apophatic move as a key element of the poetics of figuration and imagination itself. To be clear, Suso doesn't withdraw from Eckhart's radical position when he turns this apophatic move into an essential moment of the image-production. Rather, in his understanding of the function of images the very act of including the apophatic moment in the practices of

10 For the background see Largier N., "The Art of Prayer: Conversions of Interiority and Exteriority in Medieval Contemplative Practice", in Campe R. – Weber J. (eds.), *Rethinking Emotion. Interiority and Exteriority in Premodern, Modern, and Contemporary Thought* (Berlin – Boston: 2014) 58–71.

11 Largier N., "Kontextualisierung als Interpretation. Gottesgeburt und *speculatio* im *Paradisus anime intelligentis*", in Speer A. – Wegener L. (eds.), *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt* (Berlin – New York: 2005) 298–313.

figuration makes an attempt to liberate images—and figuration in general—from being bound up with both the representational function and the allegorical meaning that deprive images of their freedom. In pursuing this goal, Suso emphasizes the bare figure beyond all hermeneutics, drawing on the facticity and materiality of the incarnation—ultimately, the body on the cross¹²—as the formal ground of figuration itself.¹³ We might thus conclude that for Suso the Eckhartian process of detachment and dis-imagination turns into the core aspect of figuration and imagination, reducing it time and again to a point zero of the image in the display of the suffering body of Christ.

Suso should thus indeed be seen as the outstanding thinker of the problem of the image within this heavily iconoclastic context of Eckhartian mysticism. He is, I think, the one we have to turn to in order to understand what a theory of visual poetics can look like in the late middle ages, at least from the perspective of a group of innovative German Dominican theologians of the fourteenth century. It is possibly, I would like to add here, just one among many forms of visual poetics that emerge between Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, to name just one set of corner stones, but it is certainly one that is intellectually most sophisticated and that reflects aspects that are of significance in other traditions as well, most importantly in the Franciscan schools of thought.¹⁴

III

As I am arguing here, Suso's emphasis on an engagement with images—in traditional terms: a path through images beyond images—is significant in four ways: First, it addresses the question of representation, the critique of images, and the dis-imagination that is at the center of Eckhart's thought; second, although it does defend images and their practical use in an allegorical way it doesn't return to an exclusively allegorical mode that presents the life of the soul in form of images inspired by biblical texts; third, it also doesn't just present us with images that stand in or form a supplement for something unconceivable and unnamable that we are supposed to grasp or experience in a kind

12 Haas A.M., *Kunst rechter Gelassenheit. Themen und Schwerpunkte von Heinrich Seuses Mystik* (Bern: 1995) 149–178.

13 For a more comprehensive treatment of Suso's notion of figuration, see Largier N., "Allegorie und Figur. Figuraler Realismus bei Heinrich Seuse und Erich Auerbach", *Paragrana* 21 (2012) 36–46.

14 See Karnes M., *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago – London: 2011).

of spiritual hermeneutics through the images we use; and fourth, it emphasizes that in the encounter with the image we find ourselves in a situation where our perception and our affect move beyond allegorical levels of meaning and where perception and affect take shape before or beyond any hermeneutic engagement takes place. In exactly this regard the incarnation, the unity of man and god beyond all representation, turns for Suso into the condition of the possibility of a visual poetics that emphasizes the aspect of bare figure as the ultimate and irreducible moment where the image gives shape to the life of the soul, making it part of the divine creativity that moves through both.

What Suso discusses and develops on the basis of Eckhart's incarnation theology is thus a very strong notion of the image and its function as a figure that forms our perception and affect and that carries the soul beyond the realm both of representation and hermeneutics, negating the instrumental function in the very emergence of affect and sensation. The use of images that Suso defends produces a sphere of immanence—a sphere of figural evidence and persuasive force that doesn't know a difference between here and there, archetype and image anymore since all play with images necessarily moves back and forth beyond negation and position, apophasis and representation.

In order to explain his use of images Suso writes in his *Vita*, referring to a response he gave to a question raised by his spiritual daughter, Elsbeth Stagel:

His daughter said, 'Sir, you have spoken from your own thinking and from sacred scripture very knowledgeably and in keeping with Christian teaching about the mystery of the naked Godhead, about the flowing out and the flowing back of the spirit. Could you outline for me the hidden meanings [the truth of the incarnation and the trinity], as you understand them, by concrete comparisons [*entwerfen mit bildgebender gleichnus*]'.

He said: 'How can one form images of what entails no images or state the manner of something that has no manner (of being), that is beyond all thinking and the human intellect? No matter what one compares it to, it is still a thousand times more unlikely than like. But still, so that one may drive out one image with another, I shall now explain it to you through images and by making comparisons, as far as this is possible [...]'.¹⁵

What Suso proposes here and in the following explanations is not just an iconoclastic path that opposes images to a state of being free of images, nor

15 Suso Henry, *The Exemplar, With Two German Sermons*, ed. F. Tobin (New York: 1989) 200–201. For the German text see Seuse Heinrich, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. K. Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: 1907; reprint ed., Frankfurt a. M.: 1961).

is it a path that leads from images to a state of sheer emptiness. Instead, Suso emphasizes the fact that only a specific animation of the life of the soul through images, comparisons, similes—in one word: through a play with analogy and figure—produces the effect of both overcoming the ‘natural’ power of images and of assimilating the soul to Christ. In this process of figuration—a process that entails the production of painted images as well as words—the assimilation (*conformatio*) and the formation of the soul happens that makes it, as promised by the Scriptures, become alike to the incarnate God.

In other words, the uncovering of the hidden true and free nature of both the Scriptures and creation does indeed depend on a visual poetics. It is not to be found in a refraining from the use of images but in a specific way of producing and using images. In his Latin works Suso speaks here of *figurata locutio*, a praxis that corresponds to *bildgebende glichnus* in the quoted text above and that includes all uses of images, both in writing and in painting.

Often, this has been read as a way in which Suso defends the use of allegories in spiritual pedagogy. In my reading, however, I see Suso as the advocate of a specific poetics of image and figure that builds on theories of contemplation as theories of aesthetic, sensual, and affective experience in order to move from a conceptual mode of spiritual truth to an experiential one, or, to put it in modern terms, from a representational understanding of images to a performative and experimental one. It finds its basic expression in the statement quoted above, namely that ‘one may drive out one image with another’. In other words, images have to be denaturalized, deprived of their representational force, in order to recover their force as figures that come forth in freedom, testifying to a recovered, pre-lapsarian nature of pure forthcoming that, as Suso points out, is experienced in sheer ‘sweetness’.

Illustrating the use of images further, Suso writes in his *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, emphasizing the significance of images and imagination in contemplation:

A Dominican friar was once standing before a crucifix after matins and was complaining keenly that he was not able to meditate on his (Christ's) torment and suffering (as it deserved), and that he found this especially trying because he had been very deficient in this to that very hour. As he was standing there lamenting, his inner senses were carried off in an unusual manner, and suddenly he was clearly illumined within thus: ‘You should perform a hundred *veniae*, each one with its special meditation on my suffering and join to each meditation a petition. Each suffering shall be spiritually impressed upon you, with you repeating this same suffering to the extent you are able’. And as he stood there in this illumination

and wanted to count them, he found no more than ninety. Then he prayed to God thus: 'Dear Lord, you spoke of a hundred, and I can find no more than ninety'. Then ten more were pointed out to him, which he had previously practiced in the chapter room before following, as was his practice, his (Christ's) anguished path to death and arriving under this very crucifix. He found that the hundred meditations covered his bitter death very exactly from beginning to end. And when he had begun to practice them as he had been instructed, his previous insensitivity was transformed into heartfelt sweetness.¹⁶

He was 'illuminated' to repeat the image-contemplation together with prayers in order to amplify the rhetorical effect of both the images and the words. This practice transforms 'his previous insensitivity [...] into heartfelt sweetness'.

And Suso goes on:

Then he asked whether perhaps anyone else was experiencing this same difficulty of insensitivity and aridity while meditating on [Christ's] dear suffering, the source of all blessedness, so that such a person might also be helped by engaging in this practice and persevering in it until he too might be cured. This is why he wrote down the meditations and did it in German, because this is how they came to him from God.¹⁷

This pedagogy of meditation and contemplation makes use of images and the work of the imagination not only in terms of a spiritual pedagogy that would prepare the apophatic stage of being without images that Eckhart postulates. Instead, the very use of images produces an affective and sensual intensity that opens the path from one image to the other, from the image to its negation and back to the image, and thus to the transfiguration through the image that 'sweetness' indicates. This is, in Suso's understanding, the very becoming-the-image-of Christ according to the formula of *Galatians* 2:20, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'. It is in this use of images that one overcomes the 'unfree multiplicity' and the old 'self':

[One surrenders oneself] in happiness or suffering, in action or omission in such a way that one loses oneself completely and utterly, withdrawing from oneself irreversibly and becoming one in unity with Christ, so that one always acts at his urging and receives all things and views all things

16 Suso, *The Exemplar* 207 (*The Life of the Servant* c. 53).

17 Ibidem.

in this unity. And this detached self becomes the same form as Christ about whom the scripture by Paul says, 'I live, no longer I, Christ lives in me'. This is what I call a rightly valued self.¹⁸

It is a self that associates itself with Mary in an intimate way, emulating once again an image, in this case the image of the Pietà, as its key figure:

O pure and fair Mother, permit me, let me once more bring relief to my heart at the sight of your Love and my Lord, dear Wisdom, before the parting must come and he is carried off from us to the grave. Pure Mother, no matter how profound your sorrow was and how very deeply it may move all hearts, it still seems to me that you should somehow have found joy in lovingly embracing your dead Child. O pure, gentle Lady, I now beg you to lay your tender Child on the lap of my soul, as he looked in death, that I might experience in spirit through contemplation, as far as I can, what you then experienced physically.¹⁹

To understand the function of images and figures, imagination and figuration in this process of transfiguration we have to ask ourselves one more time how exactly Suso conceives of the process of going 'through the images beyond the images' in order to become a 'pure, bright mirror of the divine majesty'.²⁰ In Suso's words: 'How can one form images of what entails no images or state the manner of something that has no manner (of being), that is beyond all thinking and the human intellect'. For him, as he explains both in his German *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* and in the parallel Latin *Horologium sapientiae*, images are a necessary element of the path towards the experience of the union with god and the transfiguration that makes mankind again an integral, non-alien part of divine creativity. The very network of images, the shifting from positing to negation to re-positing of the image, leads mankind to 'form the suffering of Christ crucified within oneself', so that 'exterior preoccupations disappear' and the soul 'becomes sensitive to what is supernatural' in the experience of 'the constant inward flow of heavenly consolation'.²¹ The condition of possibility of the efficiency of images is the incarnation, i.e., its very facticity, not knowledge about it. It is the immanence of god in all creation, an immanence that can be brought forth in the life of the soul, in sensation, affect, and cognition through

18 Suso, *The Exemplar* 314 (*Little Book of Truth* c. 4).

19 Suso, *The Exemplar* 265 (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* c. 19).

20 Suso, *The Exemplar* 266 (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* c. 19).

21 Suso, *The Exemplar* 202 (*The Life of the Servant* c. 53).

a specific use of images. Thus, images have to bring this very facticity to the foreground without being caught up in an instrumental function, be it representational or hermeneutic. Images are in fact the necessary element in this process of overcoming the very 'natural', instrumental, representational, and hermeneutic realm, and they do this first and foremost because they produce what Suso calls an *úbernátürlich enpfintlichkeit* (a 'supernatural receptivity' or a 'supernatural sensibility') which forms the basis for the in-formation (*in sich bilden*) of Christ on the cross (*gekrúzegten Cristus*).²²

With Suso, we can thus identify three moments in the function of the image.

First, an allegorical function where images make the spiritual and hidden senses of the scriptures graspable in forms of evidence through analogy, moving beyond the literal and historical sphere into the realm of the incarnational promise. This opens a sphere of affective and sensual intensity that exceeds the very moment of contemplative focus and that finds its support in a dense network of relations and of series of images deployed in a lively manner throughout the exercise of contemplative prayer. This, however, is not the ultimate goal of the use of images.

Second, and more importantly, images have an affective and sensual function insofar as they are sensually and emotionally arousing and absorbing. Suso refers to this in his own practice of prayer where he emphasizes that images help him to overcome states of aridity. They do this not in view of a specific allegorical meaning but of the ways in which they move the soul and have an immediate impact on the sensual and the affective life, pushing it beyond the limits of understanding into a realm of affective and sensual absorption, acknowledging the very bare facticity of the incarnation.

Finally, images produce a conformation that brings the unity of Christ and man to the surface. Speaking in a different idiom, we could argue that here the perceptions turn into percepts, the affectations into affect, absorbing the soul entirely into the image and making the image the only form-giving principle of the life of the soul. The effect of the bare figure, in its most prominent exemplary form of Christ on the cross, is in this schema the very key to the transition from the allegorical mode to the emergence of the underlying unity that the image brings forth. It is also the key to the understanding of all other images since it reveals that understanding the images here doesn't mean to understand what they say, nor does it mean to grasp what they represent. Instead, the very use of the images neutralizes and negates these functions, abandoning them and their force of constituting the 'natural' realm in favor of the 'supernatural' transformation of the soul. This means that the soul shares the very principle that makes the image emerge and participates in this emer-

22 Suso, *The Exemplar* 202 (*The Life of the Servant* c. 53).

gence in form of an aesthetic, sensual, emotional, and cognitive experience. All images that Suso evokes converge in this experience of a transfiguration through the image where the soul doesn't take on the shape of the image anymore but shares its constitutive ground, i.e., the creativity of becoming-image both in its active and passive sides. Thus, Suso concludes: 'The (ultimate) image is that one should form the suffering of Christ crucified within oneself, his sweet teachings, his gentle conduct, and his pure life, which he led as an example for us to follow, and thus through him press farther within'.²³

For Suso, the allegorical mode in which images represent figuratively and allegorically the hidden senses of the scriptures can thus ultimately be understood only in an incarnational mode of bare facticity. This incarnational mode, the pure coming-forth that redeems creation beyond all instrumental function and conceptual understanding, creates the condition of the possibility to perceive the image not as a representational tool that helps our conceptual understanding. Instead, the image turns into an expression of the creation itself that brings everything back to the spontaneous coming-forth from the divine ground. For Suso, this is realized time and again not in a radical step of transcending all images into an empty ground but in a process of image-contemplation where the very meaning falls away when the image acts as that which gives shape to the life of the soul through perception and affect.

In this regard, the image itself turns into the agent of divine grace, challenging us to de-naturalize our perception and thought and to engage in a practice of shedding our attachments to representation and signification. This disimagination that the image in its bare facticity performs upon us is to be seen as the very apophatic move in Suso's visual poetics. It is, in spite of its orientation towards the image of Christ, a move from image to image that postulates a way beyond the representational and readable function of images. This is the case because a second apophatic move takes place where the image turns into 'bare figure', i.e., the very place where the soul in her contemplation of the image turns into the image itself, where she is absorbed into the image, and where, theologically speaking, she is one with Christ and with divine creativity itself in the very aesthetic experience that the image establishes.

IV

In moving through these steps from allegory to bare figure, Suso's theory of the image prepares a way of understanding aesthetic experience that comes quite close to other late medieval theories of contemplation, for example the

23 Ibidem.

one proposed by Hendrick Herp,²⁴ but also to the modern notion of aesthetic experience that we encounter—if the reader will allow this quick detour—in Herder's attempts to define the aesthetic mode of cognition. In both cases, in Herp's and in Herder's writings, we find the idea that visual experience in the end turns into tactile experience,²⁵ that the visual field of perception turns into a more fundamental horizon of perception where the visual object first becomes the form-giving principle of sensation and affect and then, losing its character as an object, the figural form of the life of the soul itself. Thus, Herder asks in a discussion of the effects of the object that provides aesthetic pleasure:

Didn't Winkelmann, in his observation of the famous sculpture of Apoll, have to destroy the very properties of the object of his contemplation, i.e., all the properties and qualities that make up our visual perception, namely color, surface, angle of view? And didn't he have to give his eyes seemingly a new sense, namely feeling and touch? And wasn't the sense that he used [namely the eye] a reduction and replacement of a more originary sense? A sense that was open to the proper or essential effect of art? Now let's suppose he [the viewer] reaches this sense? His engaged viewing, his obvious touching and feeling transport the beautiful in its form and shape into the imagination, giving it to the imagination in an embodied way [...] and thus the effect happens: the beautiful body is perceived as a body [...] the imagination becomes active and engaged, and the imagination speaks as if she felt and touched: speaks of pleasant fullness, of admirable curves, of beautiful roundness, of soft aspects, of the moving marble that is brought to life by the touching hand. These are all feelings! Why feelings? And why feelings that are *not* metaphors? They are experiences. The eye that started to collect them wasn't eye anymore when it collected; the eye turned into hand [...] perception into immediate touch. The imagination speaks feelings and touch.²⁶

In his visual poetics Suso describes a similar transition from images that function as objects of contemplation to images that turn into the very form-giving principles of the life of the soul. For Suso, this has its ground in the very fact of the incarnation that gives access to this overcoming of the representational

24 See Largier N., "Tactus. Le sens du toucher et la volupté au Moyen Age", *Micrologus* 13: *La peau humaine* (2004) 233–249.

25 See Largier N., "The Plasticity of the Soul: Mystical Darkness, Touch, and Aesthetic Experience", *Modern Language Notes* 125 (2010) 536–551.

26 Herder J.G., *Sämtliche Werke. Vol. 8*, ed. B. Suphan (Berlin: 1877–1913; reprint ed., Hildesheim: 1967–1968) 126. My translation.

function of images. It does so, since it provides us with images that turn into bare figures, figures devoid of all meaning, figures that eliminate all aspects of a 'natural' self in favor of a 'supernatural' intensity and an absorption into the divine.

Both in the case of Eckhart and in the case of Suso we might want to speak at a first step of a poetics of dis-imagination that is oriented towards the core of the incarnation, i.e., the very fact that in and through the incarnation man and god are one. The incarnation, the birth of god in the soul, the assimilation of god and man in the regions of dissimilitude of this world, or the divinization of man is to be understood in terms of freeing oneself from all images, words, and concepts that determine our thinking, perceiving, and feeling. This dis-imagination is often expressed in terms of nakedness and bareness, and Eckhart thinks of it as a practice of intellectual self-emptying. According to Suso it is, however, not to be understood in terms of a sheer iconoclasm, but in terms of a specific engagement with images that—time and again—moves from the allegorical mode of reception, i.e., the perception of the image as a carrier of meaning and as a function of representation, to an affective and sensual, and finally a figural mode of reception. In this mode the figure, both image and word, becomes bare, meaningless, naked and tactile. It is what it is, reducing us to a sheer state of receptivity where all perception is nothing else than being touched and being shaped by the image that emerges from the abyss of all emergence. For Suso, all this—and all visual poetics—is oriented toward one image, namely the figure of the naked man on the cross. Nothing didactic, nothing that means anything is left at this point, only the challenge and desire to be one with that figure. This point zero, however, will in this life, *in via*, never be reached. And thus he will, in his desire to be free, always depend on a visual poetics that produces the allegory, the rhetorical effects of sensation and affect, only to turn time and again into the bare figure that he ultimately can not grasp conceptually but only reiterate in the encounter with the image. This movement back and forth is, if we want to say so, the birth of aesthetic experience, play, and experimentation in the logic of the incarnation.

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Incarnation, Image, and Sign: John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* & Late Medieval Visual Culture

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This essay is rooted in a simple observation. The visual environment we have inherited from the Reformation was shaped by John Calvin's writing, but he did not write in that environment, at least not at first. Like Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and dozens of other Evangelicals, Calvin came of age in a world of visual density, richness, eloquence, and conceptual complexity.¹ Calvin's theology—his thinking on revelation, Incarnation, images, and signs—was formulated in a landscape of altarpieces, murals, prayer books, panel paintings, small statues of the Virgin on street corners and over entries to homes, crucifixes on persons, altars, roads, and churches.² Within a now lost visual environment he articulated his understandings of Revelation, the nature of God's self-disclosure, and of how humankind could come to see it.

Let me begin, then, by seeking however briefly to invoke Calvin's original visual environment, to set it before us. Any such effort must, of necessity, be both arbitrary and limited. The delicate interconnections of liturgy, image, altar, sacramentals, gesture, and place are gone, the spaces transformed through time, revolution, changing liturgical practices, and even the changing

1 Ganoczy A., *Calvin Théologien de l'Église et du Ministère* (Paris: 1964); Ganoczy A., *The Young Calvin*, trans. D. Foxgrover – W. Provo (Edinburgh: 1987); and Cotteret B., *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. W.M. McDonald (Grand Rapids: 1995) 3–12. The cathedral of Noyon still stands today, although it has long since been stripped of its images and, in 1801, its status as a see. For a careful reconstruction of the medieval structure, see Seymour C., *Notre-Dame of Noyon in the Twelfth Century: A Study in the Early Development of Gothic Architecture* (New Haven: 1939; reprint ed., New York: 1968).

2 The literature on late medieval Christian visuality is protean. See, for example, Hamburger J.F., *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: 1998); Hamburger J.F. (ed.), *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 2005); Lentz T. (ed.), *KultBild: Visualität und Religion in der Vormoderne*; Ohly F., *Sensus Spiritualis: Studies in Medieval Significance and the Philology of Culture*, ed. S.P. Jaffe, trans. K.J. Northcott (Chicago: 2005); and Recht R., *Believing and Seeing: The Art of Gothic Cathedrals*, trans. M. Whittall (Chicago: 2008).



FIGURE 7.1 *Nicholas Froment, "Madonna and Child appearing to Moses", central panel, Triptych of the Burning Bush (or Buisson Ardent), ca. 1475. Cathédrale Saint Sauveur Aix-en-Provence. Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.*

technology of glass production. So I begin with just two examples from that world. I have chosen them in part for their own visual complexity, which I can only intimate here, in part because they visualize revelation in ways that were particularly troubling to Calvin.

Nicholas Froment's *Burning Bush Triptych* was and is housed in the cathedral in Aix [Fig. 7.1], a region especially receptive to Calvin's teaching. It visualizes a number of connections that were common: the child Jesus seated in Mary's lap—evoking an altar; Mary, evoking Thomas Aquinas's particular affiliation of Mary and images; the presence of nature, figured in trees, fields, and rocks; the figure of the angel, who both announces Jesus and, in the image on his breast presages his death—the ways in which so many late medieval images layered time. The child holds an image of himself and Mary, in the same colors, his placement reversed, pointing towards John of Damascus's and Aquinas's arguments for the Incarnation's authorization of image-making, as well as the more ambiguous problem of representation. Moses appears far more rarely in altarpieces, and with him, the visual typology of the two tablets given by God and of the Incarnation, and yet, both Moses and the tablets would have commonly fallen under broad considerations of God's self-disclosure, God's communication with humankind, revelation. In the Froment, Moses removes his shoes, even as he shades his eyes, which look toward the child seated in the center of the bush—two materializations of divine revelation, even as the hand and the shoes signal the complex interplay of faith and sight.

The second image, *The Godly Mill*, from Ulm [Fig. 7.2], belongs to a genre.³ Once the central panel of a triptych, its original location is unknown; it is now housed in the Ulmer Museum, framed as you see it here. Reading top to bottom, Mary and the dove, embodiment of the Holy Spirit,⁴ help the symbols of the four evangelists, John, Matthew, Luke and Mark, reading left to right, pour grain into a mill. From the mill emerge the round white disks that a late medieval Christian viewer would read as hosts. The mill is operated by twelve apostles, of whom eleven remained visible after the panel was framed: on the left side, Peter turns the handle; on the right, John. Beneath, Church fathers—again, reading left to right, an archbishop, a cardinal, a bishop, and a pope—hold a chalice into which the hosts fall and in which stands a miniature Christ child. Like the Froment triptych, this was an altarpiece, placed above an altar,

3 Rye-Clausen H., *Die Hostienmühlenbilder im Lichte mittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit* (Stein Am Rein: 1981). On this particular image, see 97–99. See also Wenzel H., "Die Ausbreitung des Logos als Handwerk: Handschrift, Kelter, Hostienmühle", in B. Naumann and E. Pankow (eds.), *Bilder-Denken: Bildlichkeit und Argumentation* (Munich: 2004), esp. at 62–64.

4 Luke 3:22; cf. Matthew 3:16.



FIGURE 7.2 The Godly Mill, © Ulmer Museum / Photo: Ingeborg Schmatz, Ulm.

to which this image is also visually connected by the artifice of the floor on which the Church fathers kneel. This image evokes the images of the Mass of Pope Gregory, possibly figured on the right in the central panel, who saw Christ on the altar at the moment of consecration in the sacrament of communion.

Both images are altarpieces. Both were designed to be proximate to the site where, according to late medieval teaching, transubstantiation was to take place. Both participated variously in the Mass: open and closed, body of Christ and materializations of that body—host and image. Image and host are linked in both through the icon of the Crucifixion, which portrays what the sacrifice the Mass invokes and was, often, itself stamped on hosts.

In both, Incarnation encompasses not only the infant Jesus, his personal story as rendered in the Gospels and elaborated over a millennium, but Mary, who became visually affiliated with the altar, which in turn was seen visually to evoke the sacrifices of Abraham, Isaac, as well as the Crucifixion and came to signify the emerging understanding of the Mass in terms of sacrifice.

Incarnation, visually expressed, was far more than the doctrine of God becoming human. It embraced a virgin mother, a human life from infancy to death, and Old Testament instantiations of sacrifice, as well as the color of flesh, hair, eyes, the articulation of limbs, head, torso, hands and feet, gesture and bearing. In both images, Incarnation was situated above an altar at which transubstantiation regularly occurred, transubstantiating host into body, wine into blood, even as sacerdotal arms and hands formed crosses again and again in the movement of the Mass. The space of the panel allows all of these associations—and more—simultaneously to be visually present. Both images layer time and affiliate multiple narratives as well as persons, such as Mary, and things, the altar.

Both images render a particular conceptualization of revelation, as occurring again and again, within, as Froment suggests, the narrative of biblical time, within, as the anonymous painter of the *Godly Mill* suggests, the liturgy of the Mass, and as both suggest, in the life of the faithful. Both images render the visibility of the Incarnation not as bounded by the lifetime of Jesus, but as immediate in the living present.

Images bring ways of thinking about the Incarnation that texts cannot. It is not only that they give color, line, form; they depict specific gestures; they place figures in socially significant relationships to one another. Every text, whether read aloud or in a study, spatializes linearity: the placement of letters next to one another to form recognizable words, the placement of words on the space of a page in a line to form sentences, the arrangement of sentences in lines that lead from one page to the next. Christians learn to read left to right, top to bottom, and sentences were and are constructed according to this logic. Texts are also temporally linear: each reader begins with one word. There is materially, in ink on paper, a beginning, and an end, a sequence of words, referents, and, in the case of the Torah and the Gospels, narrative.⁵ Images, as these two suggest, can place on the same plane different moments of historical narrative and different temporalities. As in the liturgy, Incarnation is neither narrative nor, in its immediacy, eternally present.

5 See Aers D., "New Historicism and the Eucharist", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003) 247: 'Christian discourse is pervaded with narrative. Its sacred texts continually tell of a world that is given by a God whose commitment to this world involves self-disclosure in narratives, in history, self-disclosures that call Christians, in their own time, to become their tellers and themselves to become confessing, narrating subjects. [...] The Mass itself is replete with narratives and the avowal of history: sacred stories, ecclesial stories, narrative memories of the dead and their relationships to those still alive, stories about the future'.

Each of these two images visualizes a way of thinking about revelation that is both complex and specific to that image. Each also participated in a rich and dense visual field—of other images, of crucifixes and crosses, of the movements of the Mass, of the human celebrant and his gestures, the host and the chalice. Our contemporary sense of an isolated image on a wall—indeed the way the *Godly Mill* is now displayed—makes more difficult conceptualizing the world in which these images were created, in which they lived for a century and more. It has also meant that the visual environment in which Calvin wrote, in which he articulated his understanding of revelation and his critique of images, is no longer readily accessible to scholars who study him. And yet, as I hope to suggest, that world echoes in his writing: in his emphasis on the visibility of God, his conceptualization of the Incarnation, and his particular definition of ‘sign’, as much as in his critique of images.

The Visibility of God

Lest anyone, then, be excluded from access to happiness, he not only sowed in men’s minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him. Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance. Therefore the prophet very aptly exclaims that he is ‘clad with light as with a garment’ [Ps. 104:2]. It is as if he said: Thereafter the Lord began to show himself in the visible splendor of his apparel, ever since in the creation of the universe he brought forth those insignia whereby he shows his glory to us, whenever and wherever we cast our gaze. Likewise, the same prophet skillfully compares the heavens, as they are stretched out, to his royal tent and says that he has laid the beams of his chambers on the waters, has made the clouds his chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, and that the winds and lightning bolts are his swift messengers. [Ps. 104:2–4.] And since the glory of his power and wisdom shine more brightly above, heaven is often called his palace [Ps. 11:4]. Yet, in the first place, wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely

overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness. The reason why the author of *The Letter to the Hebrews* elegantly calls the universe the appearance of things invisible [Heb. 11:3] is that this skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible. The reason why the prophet attributes to the heavenly creatures a language known to every nation [Ps. 19:2 ff.] is that therein lies an attestation of divinity so apparent that it ought not to escape the gaze of even the most stupid tribe. The apostle declares this more clearly: 'What men need to know concerning God has been disclosed to them, [...] for one and all gaze upon his invisible nature, known from the creation of the world, even unto his eternal power and divinity' [Rom. 1:19–20].⁶

Imagining the interior of a late medieval cathedral helps us, I think, to read Calvin differently, in particular this most telling passage from chapter 5, Book I, of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. God, for Calvin, was visible—not only or primarily audible, but visible.⁷ God chooses to disclose himself, revelation, 'in the whole workmanship of the universe', 'whenever and wherever we cast our gaze'. God's visibility is everywhere, at one level echoing again the density of late medieval visual culture, and, at another, implicitly constructing another way of being visible everywhere—through Creation, not through representation.

Revelation, Calvin argues, is categorically discrete from human perception. It is not simply that human beings are fallen.⁸ The nature of God's visibility

6 Calvin J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F.L. Battles, ed. J.T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: 2011) I 51–53.

7 Zachman R., *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (South Bend: 2009). On revelation as the foundation of knowledge of God, see Stauffer R., *Dieu, la creation et la Providence dans la predication de Calvin* (Bern: 1978). On knowledge of God, see Dowey E.A., Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: 1994); and Pitkin B., *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context* (Oxford: 1999), ch. 1. On human fallenness and divine glory, see Kroon M., *The Honour of God and Human Salvation*, trans. J. Vriend – L.D. Bierma (Edinburgh: 2001).

8 For a succinct statement of Calvin's anthropology, see Calvin John, "Confession of Faith which all the citizens and inhabitants of Geneva and the subjects of the country must promise to keep and hold (1536)", in J.K.S. Reid (ed.—trans.), *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Louisville: 1954), Section 4, p. 27. On Calvin's anthropology, see, in addition to Kroon, Battenhouse R.W., "The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948) 447–71; and Miles M., "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*", *The Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981) 303–323.

is not simple density, pervasiveness; it is not simply that God is visible 'everywhere'. Calvin articulates God's visibility in two different sorts of terms, one kind of which again, when read in the context of late medieval visual culture, becomes discernible as carefully chosen antitheses: 'the workmanship of the universe', 'brightness'. How does one represent the 'workmanship' of the universe, although it is visible? That workmanship is visible in time, but cannot be 'comprehended', another key term for Calvin in the matter of line, color, shape. 'Brightness', as distinct from light, also eludes any form. It is visible, but 'brightness' cannot be rendered—even stained glass inhibits rather than communicates brightness. Calvin here also cites with approval certain metaphors—'mirror', 'garment'—that biblical authors took up to try to articulate that visibility in terms that also acknowledged divine 'glory'.⁹

The second set of terms—'engraved unmistakable marks of his glory', 'insignia', 'sparks of his glory'—at once invoke the visual language of late medieval Christian images¹⁰ and lay the foundation for Calvin's rejection of those images as a means to come to know God. While visible and immediate, divine revelation is not transparent, simple, self-evident. Even as God has planted 'the seed of religion', 'his essence is incomprehensible'. Revelation spatially and temporally exceeds human 'comprehension'—a term which Calvin deploys to capture as well human limitation. 'Comprehension' is containment, to make small enough for human perception.

Incarnation

For we make Christ free of all stain not just because he was begotten of his mother without copulation with man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam's fall. And this remains for us an established fact: whenever Scripture calls our attention to the purity of Christ, it is to be understood of his true human nature, for it would have been superfluous to say that God is pure. Also, the sanctification of which John, ch. 17,

9 William Bouwsma was particularly attentive to Calvin's use of metaphors; see *Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica*, Colloquy 54, Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture (Berkeley: 1987) 1–13; and idem, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: 1988).

10 Cf. Panofsky E., "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art", in idem, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: 1955) 26–54; and Friedman J.B. – Wegmann J.M., *Medieval Iconography: A Research Guide* (New York – Toronto: 1998).

speaks would have no place in divine nature [John 17:19]. Nor do we imagine that Adam's seed is twofold, even though no infection came to Christ. For the generation of man is not unclean and vicious of itself, but is so as an accidental quality arising from the Fall. No wonder, then, that Christ, through whom integrity was to be restored, was exempted from common corruption! They thrust upon us as something absurd the fact that if the Word of God became flesh, then he was confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body. This is mere impudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!¹¹

In the codicil structure of the *Institutes*—the linearity of page to page—Calvin placed the Incarnation after Creation, in Book 11. His discussion occurred within the Book on God the Redeemer, following Book 1 on God the Creator. Incarnation followed revelation structurally and temporally in the process of reading, or, more accurately, one approached Incarnation in the *Institutes* through knowledge of revelation—one learned of God's self-disclosure in revelation before reading of the Incarnation. For Calvin, moreover, the Incarnation was to be understood within the context of redemption—the emphasis was on Christ as Mediator. And for Calvin, Christ's mediation was not to be understood in terms of Christ 'taking on flesh' that was itself the locus of sin; divinity and humanity did not parse in that way for Calvin.

If John of Damascus and, following him, Thomas Aquinas, had found in the Incarnation the authorization for images, Calvin's conceptualization of the Incarnation allowed no such possibility. It rejected 'containing' God within any physical form, even as it also explicitly rejected that it is the physicality or the materiality that itself contains. This rejection of containment underpins as well Calvin's conceptualization of the Supper, in which 'our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life. For the analogy of the sign applies only if souls find their nourishment in Christ—which cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us, and refreshes us by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood.'¹²

11 Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Battles, 1 481.

12 Ibid. 11 1370.

In arguing for the singularity of Christ's flesh—its inseparability from his divinity—Calvin also withdrew grounds for any presumption that the artist's own body, or those of humankind in general, could serve as a model for representing Christ. Christ had been visible, but in a body essentially distinct from all other bodies in the divinity with which it was united. His divinity, moreover, had also been visible, but not to everyone.

Calvin's conceptualization of the Incarnation not only denied the spatial affiliation of the lived experience of bounded human bodies to any representation of Christ. For Calvin, the Incarnation also shared with revelation temporal boundlessness:

For if the Word were simply God, and yet possessed no other characteristic mark, John would wrongly have said that the Word was always with God [John 1:1]. When immediately after he adds that the Word was also God himself, he recalls us to the essence as a unity. But because he could not be with God without residing in the Father, hence emerges the idea of a subsistence, which, even though it has been joined with the essence by a common bond and cannot be separated from it, yet has a special mark whereby it is distinguished from it. Now, of the three subsistences I say that each one, while related to the others, is distinguished by a special quality. This 'relation' is here distinctly expressed: because where simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared to the Son, the character of each distinguishes the one from the other. Thirdly, whatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son.¹³

Calvin's particular construction of Christ's temporality acquires greater definition if placed within the visual culture of late medieval Europe.¹⁴ For Calvin, Christ was not to be understood either in the visualized terms of infant, youth, man, or in the terms of revelation as depicted by Froment: an instance analogous to Moses, each one occurring in linear time. While Calvin still acknowledged linear time—Christ's death occurred one time only—Christ was not 'in time' as human beings experienced it. 'God's Word' was not, as it was for others in the sixteenth century, what Christ preached historically, but 'always with God'.

13 Ibid. 1 128.

14 Sack R.D., *Homo Geographicus* (Baltimore: 1997).

For Calvin, 'Son of God, Son of Man' at once encapsulated Christ's position as Mediator and pointed towards Christ's utterly unique relationship to God and to humankind. For Calvin, Christ's divinity made impossible human 'comprehension' of Christ's nature—whether in the minds of humankind or in the matter of paint or in the form of hosts. Christ's humanity was essential to his role as Mediator, but it did not in and of itself offer any human being access to his being—it was singular. There could be no assumed affinity between human bodies and Christ's; there was no ontological foundation for representation of Christ.

Images

Meanwhile, since this brute stupidity gripped the whole world—to pant after visible figures of God, and thus to form gods of wood, stone, gold, silver, or other dead and corruptible matter—we must cling to this principle: God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him. Therefore in the law, after having claimed for himself alone the glory of deity, when he would teach what worship he approves or repudiates, God soon adds, 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any likeness' [Ex. 20:4]. By these words he restrains our waywardness from trying to represent him by any visible image, and briefly enumerates all those forms by which superstition long ago began to turn his truth into falsehood.¹⁵

[...] Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance of God.

To these evils a new wickedness joins itself, that man tries to express in his work the sort of God he has inwardly conceived. Therefore the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth.¹⁶

Calvin's discussion of images occurs in Book I of the *Institutes*, within the context of God's self-disclosure in Creation. As he himself acknowledged, images per se did not pose a problem;¹⁷ only those which sought to represent God or

15 Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Battles, I 100.

16 Ibid. I 108.

17 Doumergue E., *L'art et le sentiment dans l'œuvre de Calvin* (Reprint ed., Geneva: 1970); and Wencelius L., *L'esthétique de Calvin* (Paris: 1937).

which, placed in spaces of worship, drew adoration. The problem with images such as the Froment triptych and the *Godly Mill*, as Calvin made clear, was not their materiality or their visuality—Creation was both material and physical. It was epistemological and ontological: they claimed to represent God when, as Calvin argued, they visualized human imagination. In visualizing human imagination, they were ‘fictions’: arising not from the world outside, Creation, but from within human mind, from within human limitations. They were also ‘falsehoods’: something which presented God as contained and containable, within line, color, frame; within form; within something a human hand could draw, paint, carve. All images were ‘comprehensible’ in that negative sense Calvin had introduced: at once seeking to present God as intelligible and themselves both limiting and limited. Ontologically and epistemologically, images were what God was not.

Signs

God, indeed, from time to time showed the presence of his divine majesty by definite signs, so that he might be said to be looked upon face to face. But all the signs that he ever gave forth aptly conformed to his plan of teaching and at the same time clearly told men of his incomprehensible essence. For clouds and smoke and flame [Deut. 4:11], although they were symbols of heavenly glory, restrained the minds of all, like a bridle placed on them, from attempting to penetrate too deeply. Therefore Moses, to whom, nevertheless, God revealed himself more intimately than to the others [Ex. 33:11], did not succeed by prayers in beholding that face; but he received the answer that man is not able to bear such great brightness.¹⁸

Calvin's critique of images was not a tangent to his theology. Images such as the *Godly Mill* and the Froment triptych were directly antithetical, according to Calvin's definitions, to the very nature of divine communication, whether in Creation or through Incarnation. They posited a conceptualization of ‘signs’ essentially the opposite of divine signs, or, to put it another way, Calvin conceptualized true divine ‘signs’ as the very antithesis of the kind of visual communication imaged forth in the two altarpieces with which this essay began.¹⁹

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, F.L. Battles, trans., Vol. 1, 102.

19 Beckmann J., *Vom Sakrament bei Calvin: Die Sakramentslehre Calvins in ihren Beziehungen zu Augustin* (Tübingen: 1926); Soulié M., “Signes et sacraments dans la théologie de Jean

If this essay began with a kind of 'reading' informed by iconologic practices,²⁰ that very practice, for Calvin, was 'idolatrous', according human-made objects ontological content they did not, he argued, possess. In the *Institutes*, Calvin posits a notion of 'sign' which has its telos, in the codex of the *Institutes*, in the signs of the two sacraments, baptism and the Supper, to which he turns in Book IV:

First, we must consider what a sacrament is. It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men. Here is another briefer definition: one may call it a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him.²¹

Divine signs are not some shared code. They are not shared. They do not image forth a stable, fixed code. They are not to be approached with the same conception of knowledge—as bounded, finite, some *thing* that a human being can acquire. They are also not to be approached with the same method: from human understanding towards a material object whose meaning is fixed in that sense that one learns a code. Their meaning is not fluid, but it is also not fixed. Their meaning is learned over time; understanding is not instantaneous, but gradual.

Divine signs teach. They are rooted in a knowledge, in other words, extraneous to their human viewer. And they do not teach through the simple transmission of information. They do not teach through the memorization of texts—one mode of medieval catechesis—or through transfer of skills or discrete bodies of information. They cannot be memorized. Calvin attended at some length to inappropriate human relations towards divine signs. Again, the danger was neither materiality nor visibility, but the nature of human perception, human cognition:

Therefore, those who have devised the adoration of the Sacrament have not only dreamed it by themselves apart from Scripture, where no mention of it can be shown—something that would not have been

Calvin", in *Les signes de Dieu aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Clement-Ferrand: 1993) 27–36; and Evans G.R., "Calvin on Signs: An Augustinian ilemma", *Renaissance Studies* 3 (1989) 35–45.

20 Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology"; and Friedman, *Medieval Iconography*.

21 Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Battles, II 1277.

overlooked if it had been acceptable to God—but also, with Scripture crying out against it, they have forsaken the living God and fashioned a God after their own desire. For what is idolatry if not this: to worship the gifts in place of the Giver himself? In this there is a double transgression: for both the honor taken from God has been transferred to the creature [cf. Rom. 1:25], and he himself also has been dishonored in the defilement and profanation of his gift, when his holy Sacrament is made a hateful idol. But let us, on the other hand, to avoid falling into the same pit, fix our ears, eyes, hearts, minds, and tongues completely upon God's sacred teaching. For that is the school of that best schoolmaster, the Holy Spirit, in which we so advance that nothing need be acquired from elsewhere, but that we ought willingly to be ignorant of what is not taught in it.²²

The two images with which I began form an antithesis of Calvin's conceptualizations of revelation, Incarnation, and divine signs. He articulates his conceptualizations—incomprehensible, spatially and temporally boundless—in terms that themselves refer implicitly to the spatial and temporal aspects of late medieval images, rejecting their visual terms, the particular implications of their particular materialities, even as he acknowledges Creation as both material and visual. Analogously, Calvin's conceptualization of 'sign' implicitly rejects the kinds of visual terms that late medieval images articulated and developed.

At center is a rethinking of the nature of signs and of the relationship between knowledge and humankind, taking place, I have been suggesting, within late medieval visual culture. That culture placed before eyes visually complex images of Incarnation and revelation, the medium of paint or stone itself bringing its own connotations—form, color, line, edge—to the whole. It surrounded Christians, foremost in their churches, but also, to a lesser degree, in their towns, their roads, and in their society. The images in the landscape of Christian Europe were intellectually engaging, rich in symbol, allusion, visual affiliation, and textual reference. But they were, in Calvin's formulation, 'bounded', self-contained, precisely because, most importantly for Calvin, they originated in human imagination.

Rooted in human imagination, they could not lead beyond themselves. They could not lead the mind beyond its own limits, because they had their origins in a mind exactly alike: limited, itself bounded. Human in origin, they originated in ignorance—they could not communicate 'knowledge' because

22 Ibid. 1 1413.

they did not originate in it. They were 'fictions' because they were not a part of Creation, not a rendering of that universe that was everywhere to be seen, but human-imagined, human-made. They were 'falsehoods' because they claimed to visualize God, Incarnation, revelation, and they did not.

The *Institutes* posited not only human ignorance, but that ignorance was an essential human condition, natural to all humankind, definitive of human nature. Calvin's conceptualization of 'knowledge' located it firmly outside of humankind, expressly and definitively in God. 'Knowledge', for Calvin, was inseparable from God. God was and is boundless, temporally and spatially. So, too, let me suggest, for Calvin was knowledge. Anything that 'framed' what it claimed as 'knowledge'—whether codex or painting—posited a falsehood in two ways, first, that 'knowledge' could be contained, and second that human beings could ever 'possess' knowledge. Human minds, like human bodies, were bounded. God sought to teach human beings 'knowledge', but that knowledge was simultaneously 'incomprehensible', that is, of its essence not-human, not bounded, and therefore, not graspable.

Knowledge existed outside of humankind. Human beings could seek it—the faithful did—and they could come not to know God, but to discern God's presence, also through faith. Calvin's definition of 'knowledge' was, again, antithetical to images, which, by their very nature, were framed, contained—at one level, materially, in the physical presence of a frame, an edge, a boundary to the image; at another in their origin. Although any image might point outside itself to texts, other images, even Creation, its origin in human imagination meant, for Calvin, that it could never be other than limited.

True 'signs', Calvin argued, did not originate in human imagination—his definition of a true sign located its origin in God. True signs pointed to something that was essentially other than humankind, 'incomprehensible' spatially and temporally as well as intellectually. Visible and material, divine signs were not contained by the matter of which they were made. In this, they also helped human beings to approach the Incarnation. True signs helped human beings both to look outside themselves—to face the paradox that water, bread, and wine simultaneously were and were not mundane, that Christ was both God and man—and in so doing, to lead them to seek to understand. True signs did not bridge the distance between humankind and God, but called attention to it and in so doing, invited human beings, the faithful, at once to acknowledge that they did not 'possess' knowledge, did not know God, were ignorant, and, at the same time, to see in the sign itself that God offered them access to himself which lay outside human understanding. True signs invited humankind to seek to understand rather than to claim to understand.

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Eye to Eye, Text to Image? Jan Provoost's *Sacred Allegory*, Jan van Ruusbroec's *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, and Mystical Contemplation in the Late Medieval Low Countries

Geert Warnar

Introduction

The *visio Dei* was one of the central issues in late medieval debates on mystical theology, but there is little evidence for cross influences between textual and visual culture relating to this theme.¹ Seeing God in this life might have been the ultimate goal of the medieval mystics; their theories of vision, speculation and contemplation concerned the intellectual faculties of the human mind. Images of all sorts—pictorial, mental, literary—were crucial to medieval practices of meditation that moved the mind's eye to focus on the divine in forms of 'imageless contemplation'.² Seeing God was a matter of theological and philosophical debate, including papal doctrines on the possibility and nature of a direct vision of God in this life and/or the hereafter. Considering the abstract and scholastic nature of these discussions, it is hardly surprising that the visual

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- 1 Some relevant introductions to the theme are McGinn B., "Visio Dei. Seeing God in Medieval Theology and Mysticism", in Muessig C. – Putter A. (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion 6 (London: 2007) 15–33; Hahn C., "Visio Dei. Changes in Medieval Visuality", in Nelson R.S. (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: 2000) 169–196; and Trotman C., *La vision béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Rome: 1995).
 - 2 See Melion W., "Introduction: Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul", in Falkenburg R.L. – Melion W. – Richardson T.M. (eds.), *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Proteus Studies in Early Modern Identity Formation 1 (Turnhout: 2007) 1–36; and Hamburger J.F., "Speculations on Speculation: Vision and Perception in the Theory and Practice of Mystical Devotion", in Haug W. – Schneider-Lastin W. (eds.), *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang. Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte* (Tübingen: 2000) 353–408. See also Kleinbub C.K., "Raphael's Transfiguration as Visio-Devotional Program", *The Art Bulletin* 90 (2008) 367–393.

arts had not much to contribute to a field that lies beyond what is visible or could be visualized.³

However, there were exceptions, such as the early sixteenth century panel now in the Louvre, rather confusingly called *Sacred Allegory*, or *Christian Allegory*, and ascribed to the Flemish painter Jan Provoost [Fig. 8.1].⁴ This article



FIGURE 8.1 Jan Provoost, *Sacred Allegory*. Oil on wood, 50.5 × 40 cm, Louvre, Paris

3 One of the rare examples is discussed in Sandler L.C., “Face to Face with God: The Iconography of the Beatific Vision Reconsidered”, in Ormrod W.M. (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the Harlaxton Conference* (Suffolk: 1986) 224–235.

4 Reynaud N., “Une allegorie sacrée de Jan Provoost”, *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de la France* 25 (1975) 7–16; and Martens M.P.J. et al., *Brugge en de Renaissance. Van Memling tot Pourbus*, Notities (Bruges: 1998) 40–41.

argues that some of the many ideas and theories concerning seeing God help to understand the enigmatic imagery of the painting. In particular, the two eyes seem to visualize a set of metaphors found in the writings of the mystics that attempted to understand what the *visio Dei* could be in religious contemplation. One example, from the German sermons of the fourteenth-century Dominican Meister Eckhart, is: 'The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me'. The underlying idea is (in the words of Bernard McGinn) that 'insofar as we can be said to see God, this cannot be other than God seeing himself'. This reflexivity is present in other mystical writings as well, including the most prominent late medieval text on seeing God: *De visione Dei* by Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464).⁵ It is in these domains of late medieval mystical writing that we will find the concepts and vocabulary that help us to understand Provoost's painting in a medieval tradition of reflection and meditation on seeing God in this life.

Provoost's *Sacred Allegory*

But before exploring the ways in which late medieval art was informed by contemporary religious literature, a short introduction on the *Sacred Allegory* is in order. The painting is ascribed to the Bruges artist Jan Provoost, active in the last decade of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century.⁶ There are no clues about the patron or owner of the painting or its original function and location. The relatively small size of the painting (50.5 x 40 cm.) suggests that it was intended for private devotion. Only after its rediscovery (in the 1970s, when it came to the Louvre) did the painting receive scholarly attention, especially after Jacques Derrida selected the Provoost panel for his exhibition on seeing and memory, held at the Louvre in 1991: *Mémoires d'aveugle / Memoirs of the Blind*. Derrida discussed the painting as an allegory of vision and revelation, calling it 'une apocalypse de la peinture comme peinture chrétienne'. More helpful for a historical understanding of the painting was Derrida's assumption that the *Sacred Allegory* represents a mirroring relation

5 See McGinn B., *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* 4 (New York: 2005) 461, for the relevant passages, within a discussion of *De visione Dei*. See also: Schleusener-Eichholz G., *Das Auge im Mittelalter. Vol. 1* (Munich: 1985) 127–128.

6 Knust C., *Vorbild der Gerechtigkeit. Jan Provosts Gerichtsbild in Brügge mit einem Katalog seiner Werke* (Göttingen: 2007) 19–29.

between divine vision and human vision.⁷ The implicit suggestion was that one should look for analogies in the metaphorical language of the medieval mystics.

The art historian Nicole Reynaud had reached a similar conclusion in a short article, published shortly after the Louvre acquired the *Sacred Allegory*. Admitting that there was no satisfactory interpretation of the painting, she highlighted Provoost's originality of invention (as there seemed to be nothing like the painting) but also suggested that there must have been some 'source for such an extraordinary composition. This must have been based on a detailed religious text, but would this text have come from the tradition of theological literature, or had it been written for the occasion by some learned cleric, perhaps on demand of the commissioner, to develop a symbolic argument so subtle that it escapes us now?'⁸

Reynaud pointed out that Provoost's allusions to the *Book of Revelation* and the Last Judgment are not exactly clear. The book with the seven seals and the lamb with the banner of the Resurrection seem to suggest a scene of intercession before God. He is represented both as the Creator, holding the globe of the universe in His hand, and in His divinity: the upper eye surrounded by the nine choirs of angels. Provoost, who had painted various Last Judgment scenes, here moves away from his more traditional representations.⁹ Christ and Mary appear as the two mediators, whereas the conventional judgment scenes depict Mary and John the Baptist as intercessors. Moreover, the mediators are not kneeling, but sitting, and holding the sword of justice and the lily of mercy—which are usually depicted as the attributes of Christ the judge, as in Provoost's Last Judgment, made for the town hall of Bruges [Fig. 8.2]. The crowned Marian figure also has an olive branch and a small jewelry box, with a white dove—the Holy Spirit—resting on it. The attributes make the female figure confusingly ambiguous in the context of the Apocalypse, as if she

7 Derrida J., *Mémoires d'aveugle. L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: 1990) 121–123. Much of what has been written on the *Sacred Allegory* since then responds to Derrida's interpretation of the painting, rather than focusing on Provoost's picture: for instance, Brown F.B., *Good Taste, Bad Taste & Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford: 2000) 90–91; and Lawlor L., *The Implications of Immanence: Toward a New Concept of Life* (New York: 2006) 38–40.

8 Reynaud, "Une allegorie sacrée" 13: 'Quelle peut être la source d'une composition si exceptionnelle? Celle-ci doit vraisemblablement s'appuyer sur un texte religieux circonstancié, mais ce texte appartient-il à la littérature théologique ou a-t-il été écrit pour l'occasion par quelque clerc érudit qui élaborait, à la demande du commanditaire, un argument symbolique si raffiné qu'il nous échappe aujourd'hui?'

9 Studied extensively in Knust, *Vorbild der Gerechtigkeit*.



FIGURE 8.2 Jan Provoost, *Last Judgement*. Groeningemuseum, Bruges.

were representing simultaneously Christ's bride, the Church, and His mother Mary—her motherhood suggested by the child's head on the jewelry box in her lap. According to Reynaud, the painting seems to evoke a scene in which the human soul, represented by the lower eye and the hands stretching out, is brought before God by Christ the judge and His bride, the Church.¹⁰

Reynaud's tentative remarks may be taken as a lead for further research, especially her reservations about basing an integral interpretation on piecemeal identification of individual motifs, and her suggestion that contemporary literature may provide parallels that might help to explain Provoost's message.¹¹

¹⁰ Reynaud, "Une Allegorie" 13.

¹¹ References elsewhere in the scholarly literature do not provide a persuasive interpretation of the picture as a whole. See Belting H., *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Cambridge, Mass. – London: 2011) 214; and Schmidt-Burkhardt A., "The All-Seer: God's Eye as Proto-Surveillance", in Levin T.Y – Frohne U. – Weibel P. (eds.), *Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2002) 21.

The gesturing hands of the figures in the painting may evoke the familiar theme of intercession, but with the disembodied eyes Provoost moved far beyond the scope of any traditional image. The very salient eyes, one above, one below, would seem to invite viewers to consider more ambitious themes, such as the nature of the *visio Dei*. The lower eye, along with the pair of extended hands, represents the human factor in the painting and therefore offers the viewer a point of access from which to position him- or herself within the scene. The upper eye is staring out directly at the viewer, demanding a response.¹² This divine gaze out of the picture (*Blick aus dem Bilde*) is the focal point of Provoost's painting, that will be analyzed here in the context of the rich medieval literature on mystical contemplation.

On the Vision of God

The first literary discussion of the gaze out of the picture is found in the key medieval text on the vision of God and the visual arts: the fifteenth century treatise *De visione Dei*, written by the bishop Nicholas of Cusa, in November 1453, and addressed to the brothers of the Benedictine abbey of Tegernsee in Southern Germany.¹³ At that moment Cusa was deeply involved in an academic debate on mystical theology, but *De visione Dei* steers away from the discourse of scholastic controversy. Cusa combines the meditative language of prayer and the instructive mode of the epistolary treatise, presenting his work

12 Cf. Neumeyer A., *Der Blick aus dem Bilde* (Berlin: 1964); and Belting, *Florence and Baghdad* 84–90.

13 Neumeyer A., *Der Blick* 41. The literature on Cusa and his *De visione Dei* is enormous. I have used the edition (with English translation from which I quote) by Jasper Hopkins: Hopkins J., *Nicolas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism. Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*, Second edition (Minneapolis, 1988). A very good introduction to the text and the author within the context of mystical theology is McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism* 432–483, especially 456–469. Some other studies that present general accounts of *De visione Dei* (and are relevant for the aspects of the text under discussion here) are Miller C.L., *Reading Cusanus: Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe* (Washington: 2003), especially 147–179 (on *De visione Dei*) and Watts P.M., *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: 1982), especially 158–171. In addition to this Anglo-American tradition in Cusa-scholarship, there is a German tradition, including (for *De Visione Dei*) the contributions to Haubst R. (ed.), *Das Sehen Gottes nach Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 25. bis 27. September 1986*, *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 18 (Trier: 1989); and more recently (and of particular interest for this article) Simon H., “Bildtheoretische Grundlagen des neuzeitlichen Bildes bei Nikolaus von Kues”, *Concilium medii aevi* 7 (2004) 45–76 [<http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/211/1/04CMAcusanus.pdf>].

as a devotional exercise that leads to 'the wonders which are revealed beyond all sensible, rational and intellectual sight'.¹⁴

To guide the brothers of Tegernsee to this world of abstract ideas, Cusa makes use of a comparison or similitude. He introduces the most appropriate image he can think of: 'an image of someone omnivoyant so that his face, through subtle pictorial artistry, is such that it seems to behold everything around it'.¹⁵ Cusa sent the brothers a painting [*tabellam*] along with the treatise, to help them practice what he wrote. 'It contains the figure of someone who sees everything, and I call it the Icon of God'.¹⁶ We do not have any clear idea of what Cusa's *icona Dei* looked like, but it must have been an image in the tradition of the *Vera Icon*.¹⁷ The oldest manuscript copy of *De visione Dei*, originating from Tegernsee abbey, contains an image of the *Vera Icon* that was added to accompany the prayer 'Salva sancta facies', dedicated to the Holy Face.¹⁸

Cusa gives detailed instructions on how to use the painting in a spiritual exercise. The brothers should hang the icon on the wall, stand around it at a short distance and observe that no matter where a brother stands, he will always seem to be the sole object of the icon's gaze. The same will happen when the monks change places, and even when a monk passes in front of the icon, he will get the impression that its eyes follow him wherever he goes. Indeed, it will prove difficult or impossible to imagine how the icon's attention could be directed at anyone else. Having described this devotional practice, Cusa then announces the aim of his treatise: 'On the basis of such a sensible appearance as this, I propose to elevate you, very beloved brothers, through a devotional exercise, unto (mystical) theology'.¹⁹

14 See Hopkins, *Nicolas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism* 111–113 for the English translation; for the Latin text, 110–112: 'mirabilia, quae supra omnem sensibilem, rationalem, et intellectualem visum revelantur'.

15 Ibid., 113; Latin text, 112: 'imaginem omnia videntis proposito nostro convenientiorem, ita quod facies subtili arte pictorial ita se habeat quasi cuncta circumspiciat'.

16 Ibid., 115; Latin text 114: 'figuram cuncta videntis tenentem, quam eiconam dei appello'.

17 Simon, "Bildtheoretische Grundlagen" 59; Belting, *Florence and Baghdad* 211–225; and Stock A., "Die Rolle des 'Icona Dei' in der Spekulation 'De Visione Dei'", in Haubst R. (ed.), *Das Sehen Gottes nach Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 25. bis 27. September 1986*, Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 18 (Trier: 1989) 50–68.

18 Schmidt P., *Gedruckte Bilder in handgeschrieben Büchern. Zum Gebrauch von Druckgraphik im 15. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: 2003) 161–164.

19 Hopkins, *Nicolas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism* 117; for the Latin text, 116: 'Ex hac tali sensibili apparentia, vos fraters amantissimos per quondam praxim devotionis in mysticam propono elevare theologiam'. It is worth noting that Hopkins adds 'mystical' to

From this point onward *De visione Dei* quickly becomes more complex, although Cusa keeps referring to the metaphors and expressions he introduced during his discussion of the icon of God. Meditation on the idea of the all-seeing gaze should make the viewer aware of God's omnipresence, and this should encourage him to proceed to the higher speculations of mystical theology and the experience of absolute sight. The icon is no longer an object, but has become a metaphor to link the vocabularies of image, vision and thought in a profound discussion of what it is like to see God.²⁰ Although the dialectical approach of the philosopher is never completely absent, Cusa writes, in the language of prayer and spiritual exercise, as if he were addressing God directly in the icon. Throughout the text Cusa returns to metaphors of vision, seeing, images, the outer and inner eyes and the mirror:

[...] the one who looks upon You does not bestow form upon You; rather, he beholds himself in You, because he receives from You that which he is. And so, that which You seem to receive from the one who looks upon You—this You bestow, as if You were a living Mirror-of-eternity, which is the Form of forms. When someone looks into this Mirror, he sees his own form in the Form of forms, which is the Mirror. And he judges the form seen in the Mirror to be the image of his own form, because such would be the case with regard to a polished material mirror. However, the contrary thereof is true, because in the Mirror of eternity that which he sees is not an image but is the Truth, of which the beholder is the image. Therefore, in You, my God, the image is the Truth and Exemplar of each and every thing that exists or can exist.²¹

Much has been written about *De visione Dei*, too much to summarize, so much, in fact, that its relevance for multiple fields—religious history, theology, philosophy, mysticism, art-history, to name but a few—is more than evident. For

his translation. On the practice described here, see De Certeau M., "The Gaze. Nicholas of Cusa", *Diacritics* 17 (1987) 2–38.

20 Miller, *Reading Cusanus* 147–179; and Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus* 153–171.

21 Hopkins, *Nicolas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism* 195; for the Latin text, 194: '[...] intuentis te non dat tibi formam, sed in te intuetur se, quia a te recipit id quod est. Et ita id quod videris ab intuentis recipere, hoc donas, quasi sis speculum aeternitatis vivum, quod est forma formarum. In quod speculum dum quis respicit, videt formam suam in forma formarum, quae est speculum. Et iudicat formam quam videt in speculo materiali politi—licet contrarium illius sit verum, quia id quod videt in illo aeternitatis speculo non est figura sed veritas, cuius ipse videns est figura. Figura igitur in te, deus meus, est veritas ex exemplar omnium et singulorum quae sunt taut esse possunt'.

now, Cusa's work helps us to get an idea of the effect of contemplative images and prompts us to consider the relation between the visual arts and literature when thinking about the vision of God.²² Apart from providing insight into the medieval use of images in meditative praxis as a stage in the ascent toward imageless contemplation, Cusa's omnivoyant gaze seems to be particularly interesting for Provoost's prominent divine eye. But could a Flemish painter have been familiar with the monastic teaching of a learned Latin treatise such as *De visione Dei*?

The most direct trace of Cusa's work in the visual arts is the famous self-portrait of Albrecht Dürer in a pose that instantly reminds us of Christ in the Vera Icon-tradition [Fig. 8.3].²³ It has been argued that Dürer's decision to



FIGURE 8.3
Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait*.
Oil on lime panel, 67,1 × 48,7
cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

22 In addition to the literature mentioned in the notes, see for Cusa's relation to the (visual) arts, Catà, "Perspicere Deum: Nicholas of Cusa and European Art of the Fifteenth Century", *Viator* 39 (2008) 285–305.

23 Koerner J.L., *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: 1993).

paint himself in this fashion is based on Cusa's idea that seeing God in the living Mirror of Eternity means 'seeing oneself being seen by God'—as Cusa put it—or, to cite another phrase from *De visione Dei*: 'every face that can look at Your Face sees nothing that is other than itself or different from itself, because it sees its own Truth'.²⁴

Dürer's painting was an exceptional pictorial response to a written text, but both the portrait and *De visione Dei* are closely tied to a much broader devotional tradition focusing on images of the face of Christ. The many late medieval examples include paintings by Hans Memling and Gerard David [Figs. 8.4 & 8.5). Their portraits of Christ blessing could function in the same way as the

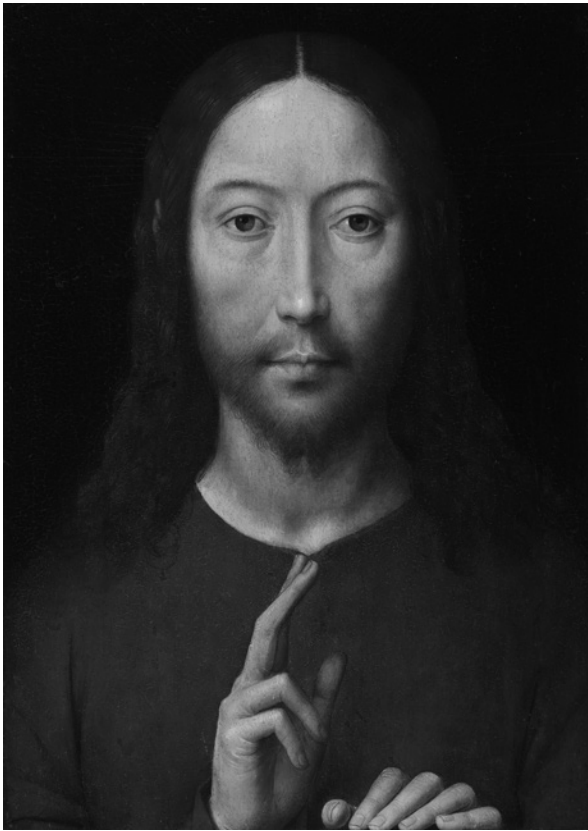


FIGURE 8.4
Hans Memling, Christ Blessing. Oil on oak panel, 34,8 × 26,2 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

24 Quotations taken from *ibid.*, 131, which forms part of Koerner's analysis of the connections between Dürer's self-portrait and Cusa's *De visione Dei* (127–38). Also see: Germ M., "Christology of Nicholas of Cusa and Christological Iconography in Self-Portraits of Albrecht Dürer", *Ikön* 1 (2008) 179–198; and Simon, "Bildtheoretische Grundlagen" 50.



FIGURE 8.5
Gerard David, *Christ Blessing*. Oil on wood, 12, 1 × 8,9 cm, *The Cloisters*, New York.

icon that Cusa sent with his *De Visione Dei*. The trompe l'oeil-effect produced by Christ's hand, which seems to rest on the actual frame, elides the distinction between real and pictorial presence, wonderfully complementing all that Cusa had written about the truth-effect of images on the mind's eye. Be that as it may, there is no incontrovertible evidence that these paintings actually constitute responses to the imagery of *De visione Dei*. Nor does the transmission history of Cusa's text and ideas point to a direct connection between these Flemish pictures and *De visione Dei*, even though the text is known to have circulated in Germany and further south across the Alps in Italy. However, the pictorial tradition to which Cusa alludes and the images of the Holy Face belong, reaches back to Van Eyck and found its way into panel painting and manuscript miniatures produced in the Flemish cities of Bruges and Ghent.²⁵

²⁵ Simon, "Bildtheoretische Grundlagen" 59, for Cusa's icon and the Van Eyck tradition. On the Vera Icon of Van Eyck and its influence, see Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*

Although the paintings by Memling and David do not seem directly related to Provoost's *Sacred Allegory*, it is certainly the case that these images of a penetrating gaze that looks out from within the picture were produced in roughly the same time and place. Memling worked in Bruges in the second half of the fifteenth century, and Gerard David was a colleague of Provoost. Not only were they contemporaries, but their careers, too, were very similar: both were based in Bruges even while maintaining a workshop in Antwerp. Both must have been familiar with the same ideas on the meditative functions of religious painting—perhaps including Cusa's theories, as we know that Provoost knew Dürer personally. During his travels through the Low Countries Dürer stayed with Provoost in Bruges. He even drew a portrait of his host.²⁶

So, in turning back to Provoost's painting, we do so with some knowledge of a relevant discursive context—the *visio Dei*—that embraced the use of painted images as contemplative instruments. The vocabulary of vision and the metaphorical language of the mystics are relevant and help us to discern how pictorial imagery functioned within meditative spiritual exercises. Cusa explored the use of images in reaching the highest forms of contemplation, moving between pictures and metaphors, effects of real presence and conceptual abstraction. This provides a context for Provoost's efforts to go beyond anything that we might label as a physical or human representation of God. The disembodied divine eye that stares out of the painting reminds us of the all-seeing gaze of Cusa's icon, but Provoost's image also reminds us of Eckhart's metaphor, quoted in my introduction: 'The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me'. It might be that Provoost had some knowledge of *De visione Dei*—if so, then possibly through Dürer. The *Sacred Allegory* evinces a correspondent interest in exploring how the mystical experience of seeing

99–108; and Smeyers M., "An Eyckian Vera Icon in a Bruges Book of Hours, ca. 1450 (New York Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. 421)", in Verbeke W. et al. (eds.), *Serta Devota in memoriam Guillelmi Lourdaux. Pars Posterior: Cultura mediaevalis* (Louvain, 1995) 195–224, especially 201 (on *De visione Dei*) and 209–218 (on the circulation in painting and miniatures in Bruges and Ghent).

26 See the short biographical sketches in Martens et al., *Brugge en de Renaissance* 66–67 (on Memling), 80–82 (on David) and 94–95 (on Provoost, including his connection to Dürer). The life and work of Gerard David has been studied more extensively than Provoost's. See, for example, Miegroet H.J., *Gerard David* (Antwerp: 1989), especially 62–84, for a discussion of David's *Transfiguration* with Christ's face modeled on the *Vera Icon* tradition. This tradition, along with the theme of transfiguration, hints at the mystical connotations of painting in Provoost's milieu.

God might be represented pictorially. But for this, Cusa's text was not the only possible source.

Eye to Eye

In the centre of the *Sacred Allegory* is the universe in God's hand, with the earth in the middle and the sun and the moon orbiting round. This representation of creation suggests that everything else in the painting belongs 'not [to] this world' but to the divine spheres of eternity. This idea is underlined by Provoost's addition of the book with seven seals, the lamb with the banner of the Resurrection (both from the Book of Revelation) and other allusions to the Last Judgment. These details from the painting clarify its setting, which Reynaud described as the condition of eternal peace and eternal blessedness. And although other elements in the painting draw the viewer's attention (especially the recurrent hands), nothing is more important and central to the painting than the singular eyes.

Within this setting of eternal blessedness, the eyes encourage the viewer to meditate on the themes of vision and seeing God. The highest eye, gazing out at the viewer of the painting, is God in his divinity, surrounded by choirs of angels and framed by clouds that open to reveal a space shaped like another eye. The lower eye is a bit more difficult to identify. The absence of a physical body, except for the outstretched hands, might indicate that the eye represents the soul, as Reynaud suggested, which would imply that Provoost attempted to give an impression of the *visio beatifica*: the seeing of God in the afterlife that is a privilege reserved for blessed souls. But the prominence and centrality of the two disembodied eyes suggest that the lower eye represents more than 'just' the soul. This ocular image more likely represents the intellectual and contemplative faculties of the mind. Provoost's lower eye gazing upward, sharing or, better, reflecting the radiance of the divine eye, as if in a mirror, is reminiscent of the idea in *De visione Dei* of 'seeing God as being seen by Him' in the living Mirror of Eternity. Again, Cusa's *De visione Dei* helps us to understand how in the medieval world of the spiritual senses the eye could transform from a physical organ into a mental faculty:

O Lord my God, the longer I behold Your Face, the more acutely You seem to me to cast the acute gaze of Your eyes upon me. Now, Your gaze causes me to reflect upon the following: that the reason this image of Your Face is depicted in the foregoing perceptible way is that a face could not have been painted without color and that color does not exist apart from

quantity. But the invisible Truth of Your Face I see not with the bodily eyes (*oculis carnis*) which look at this icon of You, but with mental and intellectual eyes (*mentalibus et intellectualibus oculis*).²⁷

Medieval religious and theological writing utilizes a broad range of metaphors that construe the inner eye and inner sight as expressions of *intelligentia*, understanding, insight and vision. Amongst ocular species, there were the mind's eye, the eye of the heart, of the soul, of contemplation, the *oculus mentis*, the *oculus intelligentiae*, the biblical *beati oculi* and the *simplex oculus* or the one-fold eye.²⁸ The distinctions are not always clear, but to understand the lower eye in Provoost's painting, the *oculus simplex* is of particular importance. The one-fold eye, with its biblical origins (Mt. 6:22), sometimes coincides with the eye of contemplation, especially in a number of mystical works where it is identified as the complete and exclusively internal concentration of the powers of the human soul that strives above all to look for and toward God. The one-fold eye then remains, whereas all other human faculties fail. Jan van Ruusbroec, the most famous mystic in the fourteenth-century Low Countries, writes in the *Spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit* (*Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*): 'If we want to behold eternal life and find it in us, then through love and faith we must transcend ourselves above reason unto our one-fold eye. There we find the clarity of God born in us'.²⁹ Is this what the viewer is invited to contemplate when looking at Provoost's painting: what it means to transcend the faculties of his or her soul in order to find the clarity of God?

This question prompts us to think in general terms about the argument of Provoost's painting, as it relates to metaphors of the one-fold eye. We may also look specifically for direct connections between the *Sacred Allegory* and Ruusbroec's *Spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit*. In this text we find exactly

27 Hopkins, *Nicolas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism* 135 for the English translation; for the Latin, 134. On Cusa and the spiritual senses Green G.W., "Nicholas of Cusa", in Gavrilyuk P.L. – Coakley S. (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: 2011) 210–223.

28 Schleusener-Eichholz G., *Das Auge* II 689–91 and 953–1049.

29 'Maer willen wi eeweghe leven sien ende venden in ons, soe moeten wi overmids minne ende gheloove ons selven boven redene onthoeghen tote in onse eenvuldeghe oeghe'. Ruusbroec Jan van, *Een spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit*, Opera Omnia 8, ed. G. de Baere (Turnhout: 2001) II 2035–38; II 1899–1900, for the English translation. My translation differs at some points from the one found in the edition, especially concerning *clærheit*, translated as resplendence in the edition, but as clarity by me, in an attempt to include the connotation of light and transparency that are of fundamental importance here.

the sort of visual tropes that Nicole Reynaud thought might help to explain the enigmatic imagery of Provoost. The section of the *Spiegel* from which the quotation comes is one of Ruusbroec's most profound discussions of man's existence in God as an object for contemplation; its special significance for Provoost's painting is that the text is full of references to the visual, to clarity, seeing and the one-fold eye.³⁰ For instance, when Ruusbroec explains the nature of divine clarity:

it is the image of God that has transformed our one-fold eye: no other image can come therein. Yet in the infused light we can recognize all that is less than God, if He wants to show this to us. Sight [= faculty of vision, eyesight] receives the entire image of God, undivided and whole; and it is also entire to any one, and stays undivided in itself. We recognize the image with Himself, there where we receive it. But when we are carried over and are transformed in His clarity we forget ourselves and are one with it. And thus we live in it and it in us. Still we remain always separate in substance and in nature. The clarity of God that we see in ourselves has neither beginning nor end, time nor place, way nor path, form nor shape or color. It has wholly embraced us, encompassed us and gone through us, and opened our one-fold sight [= faculty of vision] so wide that our eye must stay open eternally; we cannot close it.³¹

30 Analysis in McGinn B., *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 1350–1550*. The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism 5 (New York: 2012) 20–22, with some of the same quotations as will be given here. For general information on Ruusbroec's *Spiegel* see Warnar G., *Ruusbroec: Literature and Mysticism in the Fourteenth-Century* (Leiden: 2007) 255–263.

31 Ruusbroec, *Een spiegel der eeuwighe salicheit* ll 2038–52; English translation ll 1901–13: 'Ende si es dat beelde gods, dat overformt heeft onse eenvuldeghe ooghe; daer en mach en gheen ander beelde in comen. Nochtan moghen wi in ghegaefden lichte al dat bekinnen dat mendere es dan god, eest dat hijt ons vertoonen wilt. Dat beelde gods ontfet ieghewelc ghesichte al, onghedeilt ende gheheel, ende het es oec ieghewelken al, ende blijft in hem selven een onghedeilt een. Dat beelde bekinnen wi met hem selven daer wijt ontfen. Maer daer wi overdragen sijn ende ghetransformeert in sine claecheit, daer hebben wi ons selfs vergheten, ende sijn een met heme. Ende aldus leven wi in heme, ende hi in ons. Nochtan bliven wi altoes ghescheeden in substantien ende in natueren. De claecheit gods die wi sien in ons, si en heeft beghin noch inde, tijt noch stat, wech noch pad, forme noch ghedeente noch varwe. Si heeft ons te male bevaen, begrepen ende doorgaen, ende onse eenvuldeghe ghesichte soe wide ontdaen: onse ooghe moet ewelec open staen, wi en connense niet ghelucken'.

Much, if not everything, Ruusbroec tries to put into words here, returns in Provoost's painting: here also the divinely transformed one-fold eye has been opened wide by God's clarity and cannot do anything else than absorb it. Just as Ruusbroec uses the figurative language of seeing, Provoost uses the pictorial imagery of eyesight to create a mirror of eternal blessedness: the all-seeing eye stares out at the viewer, as if some sort of contact were possible in spite of, but not in contradiction with, the (doctrinally) absolute distinction between Creator and creature.

Ruusbroec's words are taken from the final section of the *Spiegel*, where he returns to the theme of the living life (*levende leven*) that he discussed earlier in the text. His address to the reader (and explanation why he has returned to this subject) urges him to be mentally prepared and focused in a way that applies equally to Provoost's painting:

Now all of you, lift your mind and your plain sight, above all the heavens and above all that is created, for I want to show to you the living life that is hidden in us, wherein our highest blessedness lies, and whereof I have spoken before, but not clarified enough.³²

Ruusbroec refers back to his introductory discussion of the *levende leven*, the living life 'where are joined together created and eternal (literally: uncreated), God and creature'.³³ Ruusbroec addresses a specific group of people, exercitants who have reached a spiritual state that is open to the highest form of contemplation. To them Ruusbroec explains that this living life is man's connection to the eternal God, who is to be felt and found within oneself, by the votary who, in addition to living his life virtuously in the image of God's wisdom, seeks to encounter the divinity shared by the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit. For Ruusbroec the living life encompasses man's very existence:

For our life is always being, seeing, and inclining toward the origin of our createdness. There we live from God, and toward God; and God in us and we in Him. And this is a living life that is in us all essentially and in bare nature.³⁴

32 Ibid., ll 2019–22; English translation, ll 1883–86: 'Nu verheft alle uwe ghemuede ende uwe blooete ghesichte boven alle hemele ende boven al dat ghescapen es, want ic will eons tooenen dat levende leven dat in ons verborghen es, daer onse overste saleghheit in gheleghen es ende daer ic vore af ghesproken hebbe, maer niet gnoegh verclaert'.

33 Ibid. ll 1703–1704; English translation, ll 1593–94.

34 Ibid. ll 1714–16; English translation ll 1602–1605: 'Want onse leven es altoes wesende, siende, ende neighende in den orsprong onser ghescapenheit. Daer leven wi uut gode,

As is often the case in Ruusbroec's written works, the author does not really give a definition, but instead offers a set of expressions to outline a concept, to make it comprehensible and to turn it into an object for contemplation. It is here that he explores even more intensely the imagery of seeing, asking his readers to 'lift up your eyes then above reason' ('heft dan op uwe ooeghen boven redene') and to behold the living life 'with gazing eyes' ('met starenden ooeghen'). God is a living exemplar, knowing and understanding Himself and all things in a unified act of 'seeing' (*siene* in Ruusbroec's medieval Dutch).³⁵ God has created every human soul 'as a living mirror, wherein He has impressed the image of His nature, and so He lives imaged in us, and we in Him; for our created life is one, without intermediary, with the image and with the life that we have eternally in God.'³⁶ Again, the term *clærheit* ('clarity') is prominent in Ruusbroec's language; it blinds the eyes of reason, 'but the one-fold eye, above reason, grounded in understanding, is always open, and contemplates (*schouwet*), and gazes in plain sight upon the light with that same light'. It should be noted that the Dutch verb *schouwen* (translated here as 'contemplate') has strong visual connotations (cf. the modern German *schauen*). This all culminates in a statement that reads like a ground plan for Provoost's painting: 'There is eye to eye, mirror to mirror, image to image'.³⁷

Ruusbroec's metaphorical equation of the eye, the mirror and the image is crucial for understanding the eyes in Provoost's painting, with the inner eye gazing at and reflecting God's clarity like a living mirror. Ruusbroec goes on to describe this mirror in considerable detail. The mirror of the soul, as he puts it, can receive nothing but the clarity that is God's image. This clarity is both what we see and the light with which we see, but not the eye that sees. God's image is in the mirror (the eye), but does not become the image, because God can never become indistinguishable from one of the creatures He has created. These insights are summarized in the following virtually untranslatable lines from the *Spiegel*, which I quote in Ruusbroec's original Dutch:

ende toe gode; ende god in ons, ende wi in heme. Ende dit es .i. levende leven dat in ons allen es weselec ende in blooeter natueren'.

35 Ibid. II 1730–32 and 1764.

36 Ibid. II 1791–1795; English translation, II 1672–76: 'alse eenen levenden spiegel daer hi dat beelde sijn natueren in ghedruct heeft. Ende also leeft hi ghebeeldt in ons ende wi in heme. Want onse ghescapene leven es een sonder middel met dien beelde ende met dien levende dat wi ewelec in gode hebben'.

37 Ibid. II 1838–41; English translation, II 1717–19: 'Maer die eenvuldeghe ooghe boven redene in den gronde der verstendegheit, die es altoes open ende scouwet ende staert met blooeten ghesichte dat licht met den selven lichte. Daer es ooghe jeghen ooghe, spiegel jeghen spiegel, beelde jeghen beelde'. On *schouwen*, see Schleusener-Eichholz, *Das Auge im Mittelalter* II 992–993.

Want de sie in onse eenvuldeghe ooghe es een levende spieghel dien god ghemaect heft toe sinen beelde ende daer hi sijn beelde in ghe-druct heeft. Sijn beelde dat es sine godlike claeurheit. Daer mede heeft hi overvloedeghe vervult den spieghel onser zielen, alsoe dat daer en gheen andere claeurheit noch ander beelde in comen en mach. Maer die claeurheit en es gheen middel tusschen ons ende gode, want si es dat selve dat wi sien ende oec dat licht daer wi mede sien, maer niet onse ooghe die siet. Want al es dat beelde gods sonder middel in den spieghel onser zielen ende hem gheenrecht, nochtan es dat beelde de spieghel niet, want god en wert niet creatuere.³⁸

Painted image and written text seem to come together very closely here, so thoroughly, in fact, that Provoost appears to have found pictorial equivalents for Ruusbroec's words, not least his careful and precise distinction between creation and the Creator, the temporal and the eternal. With these correspondences in mind, it seems fair to characterize Provoost's painting as a pictorial version of the mirror of eternal blessedness.

In itself, the idea that Ruusbroec's writing informed Netherlandish painting should come as no surprise. Recent research has pointed out that Ruusbroec's thoughts on contemplation and the use of images provide pertinent models for understanding the meditative function of religious painting; and more specifically, Rogier van der Weyden's affinity with the practices of mystical devotion has been traced back to his familiarity with Ruusbroec's work, especially his exegetical magnum opus, *Vanden geesteliken tabernakel* (*On the Spiritual Tabernacle*) and the *Spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit*.³⁹ However, Provoost's use of this last text may have been even more direct. Like Van der Weyden, he recognized the pictorial potential in the *Spieghel*, but he really attempted to translate its vocabulary, metaphors, similitudes and figurative language into a coherent visual representation of the highest forms of mystical contemplation. Provoost's interpretation of the *Spieghel* even gives us grounds for reassessing

38 Ruusbroec, *Een spieghel der eeuwigher salicheit* ll 1842–58

39 See Falque I., "See the Bridegroom Cometh: Go Out and Meet Him': On Spiritual Progress and Mystical Union in Early Netherlandish Painting", in Melion W. – Clifton J. – Weemans M. (eds.), *Imago Exegetica. Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400–1700*, *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* 33 (Leiden: 2014) 361–386; and, in the same volume, Wise E., "Rogier van der Weyden and Jan van Ruusbroec: Reading, Rending, and Re-Fashioning the 'Twice-Dyed' Veil of Blood in the Escorial *Crucifixion*", 387–422, especially 387–388, on the need for more art historical attention to Ruusbroec, and with reference to some studies in Dutch.

aspects of the modern English translation in the critical edition. Ruusbroec describes the living mirror of the soul as the 'sie in onse eenvuldeghe ooeghe' ('the seeing in our one-fold eye'). However, the medieval Dutch *sie* also has the meaning pupil (of the eye), which seems plausible here. When Ruusbroec speaks of 'seeing' in the sense of casting one's gaze, he uses the noun *siene*: for instance, 'hi bekint hem selven ende alle ding in eenen siene' ('He [God] knows Himself and all things in one [act of] seeing').⁴⁰ With reference to Ruusbroec's 'sie in onse eenvuldeghe ooeghe' as the *pupil* in our one-fold eye, Provoost really has painted his lower eye as the living mirror of God's image. God's divine eye appears within an opening in the clouds that also has the shape of an eye: the divine eye within the eye that opens up to the created world in God's hand, is mirrored by the pupil within the one-fold eye that operates above, in the sense of beyond, reason.

Provoost's examination of mystical writing led him to formulate an intriguing pictorial response to the question of the role of images in practices of meditation that aspire to reach registers of experience beyond the imaginable. That God's presence is inconceivable, and yet lies at the heart of the 'living life', is, paradoxically, a concept upon which Ruusbroec urges the votary to meditate; the revelatory experience of this incommensurable truth ultimately becomes the votary's true object of contemplation. Visualizing this idea, Provoost drew upon Ruusbroec's expression of 'eye to eye, mirror to mirror, image to image', turning the one-fold eye of contemplation into a mirror of the divine eye. But God's divine eye stares out at the viewer, placing him or her in the same position as the exercitant who discerns what Ruusbroec called the living life. Looking at Provoost's painting is like staring into a mirror of eternal blessedness. Trying to apprehend this mirror, our one-fold eye sees how the eye becomes, in Ruusbroec's words, 'a living mirror that God has made to His image'. Both author and painter present this realization as the node and goal of contemplation: in looking at the divine eye, the viewer is lifted up to 'the wonders which are revealed beyond all sensible, rational and intellectual sight' (to quote Nicholas of Cusa in his explanation of how to use painted images in the religious practice of mystical contemplation).

Provoost's painting operates more intensively and comprehensively than the icon of Cusa. It does not merely invite us to reflect on the relationship between image and truth—or between Christ's humanity and divinity; it also draws the viewer directly into the realm of eternity, prompting him to

40 Ruusbroec, *Een spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit* ll 1763–64; English translation, ll 1647. On the noun *sie*, see Verwijs E. – Verdam J. et al., *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek* (The Hague: 1885–1971), consulted through *De geïntegreerde taalbank* <http://gtb.inl.nl/?owner=MNW>.

visualize, to the fullest extent possible, how God reveals Himself in the 'bareness of his nature and substance' ('bloothheit sijne natueren ende substan-cien'). This phrase comes not from the *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, but from another *Mirror*: the *Spiegel der volcomenheit*, or *Mirror of Perfection*, a compendium of mystical theology written by the Franciscan Hendrik Herp in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴¹ And this text is of primary importance, for it allows us further to contextualize Provoost's painting.

Provoost in Context: Late Medieval Mystical Literature and Culture in the Low Countries

The interpretation of Provoost's *Sacred Allegory* as an image of the highest forms of mystical contemplation assumes that painting and literature were interconnected in a way that goes beyond a shared frame of reference. The discursive situation that led Cusa to organize *De visione Dei* around an icon of the omnivoyant gaze, also encompassed Provoost.⁴² The *Sacred Allegory* is based 'literally' on notions found in Ruusbroec's *Spiegel*. Therefore, we need to get an idea of how this painting originated and functioned in a late medieval context: how were notions deriving from Ruusbroec's fourteenth-century *Spiegel* available to Provoost, and in what form.

For this exercise in contextualization, we turn to Hendrik Herp and his *Spiegel der volcomenheit*. The author and his work offer a possible *trait d'union* between Ruusbroec and Provoost (and perhaps even Nicholas of Cusa). The *Spiegel der volcomenheit* is Herp's only vernacular work, written around 1460 at the request of an anonymous widow, and structured as a guide for mystical devotion that leads to what Herp calls 'proper contemplation' ('properlic contempleren'). Herp's detailed descriptions of the stages through which the human mind passes, rely on Ruusbroec's works. When Herp finally reaches, in the final pages of his *Spiegel*, the stage of 'proper contemplation', he invokes the *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*, especially the chapters on the living life. The next lines remind us of Ruusbroec, but also of Cusa:

41 Herp H., *Spiegel der volcomenheit. Vol. II*, ed. L. Verschueren (Antwerp: 1931) 419.

42 In general, on the connections between literature and the visual arts in medieval studies and the need to assess these connections carefully by referring to such terms as 'translation'; see Ott N.H., "Word and Image as a Field of Research: Sound Methodologies or Just a Fashionable Trend? A Polemic from a European Perspective", in Starkey K. – Wenzel H. (eds.), *Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages* (New York et al.: 2005) 15–32.

Nevertheless, God does not show Himself as He is in his unutterable glory, but he shows Himself to each one of us in accordance with the light that each person receives, illuminating the eye of the spirit and making us ready to receive it. Still, this light bestows on the contemplative spirit a true knowledge with which it sees God, insofar as one may see God in this life. This is called proper contemplation: that is, seeing God in a simple and one-fold manner, so that the one-fold eye of thought laid bare does not receive any other image, but solely and completely the divine image, which it [=the one-fold eye] knows in itself as it receives it [=the divine image].⁴³

Earlier in the text Herp describes this one-fold eye in more detail, referring to it as *verstandelike claeerheit*, meaning the clarity of the intellect when the human mind is stripped of all considerations, distinctions and images. The bareness of thought that remains is the one-fold eye of the soul or the heart of the soul, with which one sees God ('bloothet der ghedachten, die daer is dat simpel oghe der zielen of dat herte der zielen daer men God mede siet'). Herp explicitly cites Ruusbroec's *Spiegel* when speaking of the one-fold eye that is opened wide, with the one-fold thought laid bare as a living mirror.⁴⁴

Herp's work shows how concepts from Ruusbroec's *Spiegel* were passed on during the second half of the fifteenth century, along with the ongoing transmission of his texts themselves.⁴⁵ We know that Herp's *Spiegel* circulated in

43 Herp, *Spiegel der volcomenheit*. Vol. II 419: 'Nochtan en toent Hem God niet, als Hi is in sijne onwtsprekeliker glorien, mer Hi thoent Hem eenen yghelic na die manier vanden ontfanghen licht, daer dat oghe des geestes mede verclaert ende bequaem ghemaict is. Nochtan so gheeft dit licht den scouwenden geesten een waer bekenen, dat si God sien, als men Hem hier in desen leuen sien mach. Ende dit hiet properlic contempleren, dat is, God simpelic ende eenvoldelic te scouwen, also dattet simpel oghe der bloter ghedachten gheen ander beelt en ontfanghet, mer alleen ende gheheel dat godlike beelt, dat hi bekent mit hem seluen, dair hijt ontfanghet'. For the English translation, see Nieuwenhove R. van—Faesen R. — Rolfson H. (eds.), *Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries* (Mahwah: 2008) 163. I have revised their translation.

44 Herp, *Spiegel der volcomenheit* Vol. II, 365–69.

45 Herp also was a *trait d'union* between Ruusbroec and Cusa. The Franciscan might have studied at the University of Louvain under Heymericus de Campo, who taught Cusa in Cologne. Herp and Cusa may also have met later in life, when they were both in Rome or in the Low Countries, during Cusa's reform work when Herp was one of the leading figures in the new Franciscan observance. See, for details, Dlabáčová A., *Literatuur en observantie. De Spiegel der volcomenheit van Hendrik Herp en de dynamiek van laatmiddeleeuwse tekstverspreiding* (Hilversum: 2014), see the index on: Cusanus. Moreover, it is not inconceivable that Cusa knew Ruusbroec's *Spiegel*. As we have seen Cusa also spoke of

Provoost's professional milieu. The text was printed in Antwerp three times between 1500 and 1512, during the time that Provoost was a member of the city's Guild of St. Luke, in which printers, painters and poet-rhetoricians were united.⁴⁶ Here we find an historical context for the origins of the painting, a community where texts and the visual arts interacted.

The contacts between printers, painters and rhetoricians might give us an idea of the way Ruusbroec's *Spiegel* reached Provoost's workshop. The *Spiegel* is the only work by Ruusbroec that certainly circulated in the communities of the rhetoricians (*rederijkers*), associations of lay poets, playwrights and performers. One of the best known rhetoricians, the Bruges poet Anthonis de Roovere, based his strophic *Lof van den Heylighen Sacramente* (*In Praise of the Holy Sacrament*) on Ruusbroec's *Spiegel*.⁴⁷ Another rhetorical text to which Ruusbroec's *Spiegel* has been connected is even more famous: *Elckerlijc*, the Dutch original of *Everyman*.⁴⁸ This morality play is described on the title page as a *Spiegel der salicheyt van elckerlijc*—meaning 'Everyman's mirror of blessedness', or, alternatively, 'Mirror of every man's blessedness', with *salicheit* here having stronger connotations of salvation than in Ruusbroec's *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*.⁴⁹ A more striking parallel is found in the prayer of *Elckerlijc*, who begs for mercy and addresses God as the *levende leven* or living life:

a living mirror—although for him God is the living mirror of eternity. The *Spiegel* was translated into Latin by Geert Grote as early as the fourteenth century, and as a papal legate Cusa had traveled through the Low Countries.

46 On Provoost's membership in the Guild of St. Luke and his connections to the rhetoricians, see Martens et al., *Brugge en de Renaissance* 94–95. On printed editions of Herp's *Spiegel der volcomenheit*, and on ties between the printers and the guild, see Dlabáčová, *Literatuur en observantie* 210–223. More generally, on printers and rhetoricians, see Brinkman H., "De const ter perse. Publiceren bij de rederijkers voor de Reformatie", in Pleij H. et al., *Geschreven en gedrukt. Boekproductie van handschrift naar druk in de overgang van Middeleeuwen naar Moderne Tijd* (Gent: 2004) 157–176. On sixteenth-century painting and the rhetoricians, see Gibson W., "Artists and Rederijkers in the Age of Bruegel", *The Art Bulletin* 63 (1981) 426–46; also see Bruaene A.L. van, "A wonderfull tryumfe, for the wyning of a pryse: Guilds, Ritual, Theater, and the Urban Network in the Southern Low Countries, ca. 1450–1650", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 59 (2006) 374–405.

47 Warnar, *Ruusbroec* 266.

48 Kazemier G., "*Elckerlijc*, het *Dal sonder wederkeeren*, en de mystiek (vervolg)", *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 34 (1940) 116–128.

49 The most recent edition of the Dutch text, with the medieval English version and a modern English translation, is Davidson C. – Walsh M.W. – Broos T.J. (eds.), *Everyman and Its Dutch Original, Elckerlijc* (Kalamazoo: 2007). English quotations are from this edition as transmitted in the digital version: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/davidson-everyman-and-its-dutch-original-elckerlijc>.

O living Life! O heavenly Bread!
 O Way of truth! O Divine Being,
 who descended from his Father's bosom,
 coming down into a pure Maid,
 because you wanted to heal Everyman.⁵⁰

The expression 'living life', as used by Ruusbroec in the *Spiegel*, appears in the *Elckerlijc* as an equivalent for *godlic wesen* [=divine being, or, better: essence]. This usages recurs in no other contemporary Dutch text. The connection between the *Spiegel* and *Elckerlijc* provides a ready context for the observation that another painting by Jan Provoost shows close affinities to the rhetorician's play. His *Death and the Miser*, painted on the outside panels of a triptych (along with a self-portrait of the painter) portrays the opening scene of *Elckerlijc*, with the protagonist facing Death [Fig. 8.6]. *Elckerlijc* was printed two times by Antwerp printers registered with the Guild of St. Luke in the period 1500–1525), when Provoost was also a member.⁵¹

Although Provoost's *Sacred Allegory* seems to have emerged from an artistic community of painters, printers and rhetoricians, it is hard to imagine members of these lay communities using the panel for a religious exercise like the one Cusa adduced for the brothers at the Tegernsee. The traditional religion of the confraternities, guilds and chambers of rhetoric did not focus on the *visio Dei* that Cusa discussed at length in his learned Latin treatise.⁵² However, the visual arts could function interstitially, breaking down cultural barriers between high and low, just as the vernacular works by Jan van Ruusbroec, Hendrik Herp and others opened up the world of religious learning to new and wider audiences with spiritual interests.⁵³ The title page in the printed

50 Davidson, *Everyman*, ll 535–39: 'O levende Leven! O hemels Broot!, O Wech der waerhey! O Godlic Wesen, Die neder quam uut sijns Vaders schoot, In een suver Maecht gheresen, Om dat ghi Elckerlijc wout ghenesen'.

51 On this painting, see Martens et al., *Brugge en de Renaissance* 35–36. On the Antwerp Elckerlijc-editions, see Brinkman, "De const ter perse", 163–64. On Provoost inspired by the Elckerlijc see Warnar G., "*Elckerlijc* in beeld: Jan Provoosts 'rijkaard en de dood'", *Spiegel der letteren* 57 (2015), forthcoming.

52 For an authoritative overview of late medieval 'traditional religion' and its relation to mainstream Christianity, see Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (Second edition, New Haven—London: 2005); also see, on more intense and mystical varieties of lay spirituality, Engen J. van, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church", *Church History* 77 (2008) 257–284.

53 A point made in Hamburger J.F., "The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History: Problems, Positions, Possibilities", in Hamburger J.F. – A.-M. Bouché (eds.), *The Mind's Eye*:



FIGURE 8.6 Jan Provoost, *Death and the Miser*. Groeningemuseum, Bruges.

editions of Hendrik Herp's *Spiegel der volcomenheit* claims, for example, that the text offers 'pious and profitable material both for religious and secular persons, who may thus come to a true knowledge of God and [them]selves'.⁵⁴ If such a detailed text on the mystical life was potentially open to all, then Provoost's *Sacred Allegory* may likewise have functioned as a contemplative instrument, offering access to the mystical life. Or should we perhaps rename the painting *Mirror of Eternal Blessedness*, viewing it in light of the *Spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit*'s introductory verses, substituting Provoost's painting for Ruusbroec's book:

Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages (Princeton: 2006) 11–31, especially 12–13. Compare for vernacular literature and learning, Warnar G., "Men of Letters: Medieval Dutch Literature and Learning", in: Hoenen M.J.F.M.– Cesalli L. –Germann N. (eds.), *University, Council, City: Intellectual Culture on the Rhine (1300–1550)* (Turnhout: 2007) 221–246.

54 Dlabáčová, *Literatuur en observantie* 213: 'devoet ende profitelike materie beide voer gheestelijc ende weerlic personen om te comen tot rechter kennissen Gods ende ons selfs'.

This book may well be a mirror
 In which one truly may read
 God, all virtues and eternal life.
 Therefore this name is given to it:
 Mirror of Eternal Blessedness.
 Who mirrors himself in it practices wisdom.⁵⁵

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55 Ruusbroec, *Een spiegel der eeuwigher salicheit* ll 1–6: ‘Dit boec mach wel .i. spiegel wesen, daermen waerlec in mach lesen gode, alle dooghde ende eeweghe leven. Daer omme is hem dese name ghegeven: Spiegel der eewgher salecheit. Diere hem in spieghelt doet wijsheit’.

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‘A Just Proportion of Body and Soul’: Emblems and Incarnational Grafting

Christopher Wild

An Almost Emblematic Age

As is well known, Johann Gottfried Herder called the German Baroque ‘ein beinahe emblematisches Zeitalter’ (‘an almost emblematic age’)¹ and, thus, identified this genre or art form with the period’s aesthetic culture as a whole. And with good reason: In the 200 years after Andrea Alciato unwittingly invented the genre in 1531 with the publication of his little booklet of illustrated epigrams, the *Emblematum liber*, emblem books were exceedingly popular. According to some estimates more than 600 authors published more than 1000 titles in 2000 editions amounting to well over one million copies. Emblems were published in every European language on a vast range of subjects, from erotic to religious topics, from alchemical imagery to military matters. Moreover, emblems were not restricted to the Gutenberg Galaxy, but spread into other ‘extensions of man’ like sermons, dramas and other theatrical spectacles, objets d’art, furniture, tapestries, buildings, parades and processions to name only a few. More abstractly, scholars of the Baroque have identified emblematic structures, namely the triadic constellation of motto (*inscriptio*), image (*pictura*), and accompanying text (*subscriptio*), in almost every cultural artifact of the period.²

In contrast, Herder’s own age was not emblematic. It was enlightened; and enlightened meant to keep the beaux arts and the belles lettres apart; not to mix painting and poetry, but to respect their medial specificity. Clearly, Horace’s famous *ut pictura poesis* (‘as is painting so is poetry’) had lost its authority. Lessing put it bluntly in the preface to his *Laocoon* essay when he stated that Simonides’ chiasm: *Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens*, namely that ‘poetry is a speaking picture, and painting a mute poem’,

1 Herder Johann Gottfried, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. XVI, ed. B. Suphan (Hildesheim: 1967) 230.

2 Cf. Schöne A., *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (München: 1974) 18–26. Schöne makes this triadic structure, which he calls ‘Dreiständigkeit’, the defining criteria of the emblem and the emblematical more generally. There has been much scholarly debate about this definition, which I will forgo reviewing, since it is not the purview of this essay.

was simply wrong and responsible for a long history of aesthetic errors.³ Concomitantly, emblems were seen to be symptomatic for the Baroque's lack of semiotic transparency. Enlightenment viewers and readers no longer had a taste and comprehension for the playful opacity of Baroque poetic imagery and bimodal art forms. Thus, the Swiss philologist Johann Jakob Breitinger, who partnered with his compatriot Johann Jakob Bodmer to put literature on a more sound, enlightened aesthetic footing, roundly condemned Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's ornate Baroque style for its bad taste, unmotivated randomness and irrationality.⁴ In particular, they singled out the 'hieroglyphic and enigmatic opacity' of his emblematic allegories: 'While similes usually serve to explain a thing, here they have the intended purpose of enshrouding a clear thought in darkness and obscurity'.⁵ Because Baroque allegories lack a recognizable *tertium comparationis* or ground of comparison, they appear intransparent. In the eyes of Enlightenment readers Baroque imagery produces, therefore, the opposite of its intended effect. 'Instead of deploying their pictorial power to spread clarity and light over the expressed thoughts', as Breitinger demands, Baroque allegories obscure what they communicate. It was, of course, Lessing's *Laocoön* essay, subtitled "On the Limits of Poetry and Painting", that most clearly stated the demarcation of artistic media and the transparency of the aesthetic sign. Lessing accomplished the most complete articulation of Enlightenment semiotics and aesthetics⁶ by following Johann Joachim Winckelmann's lead in returning to Greek art. In fact, the *Laocoon* essay can be understood as an attempt to articulate an aesthetics founded

3 Lessing Gotthold Ephraim, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. Allen McCormick (Baltimore – London: 1984) 4. Cf. also Scholz B., "‘Das Bild wird für den Leib, die Schrift für die Seele eines Sinn-Bildes geachtet’: Zur Rekonstruktion einer frühmodernen poetologischen Metapher", in idem, *Emblem und Emblempoetik: Historische und systematische Studien* (Berlin: 2002) 215–230, esp. 217ff.

4 Cf. also Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama* 119–135.

5 Breitinger Johann Jacob, *Critische Abhandlung von der Natur, den Absichten und dem Gebrauche der Gleichnisse. Mit Beyspielen aus den Schriften der berühmtesten alten und neuen Scribenten erläutert* (Zürich, Conrad Orell: 1740) 464: 'Da die Gleichnisse sonst dienen, eine Sache zu erklären, so hat dieses hier den ganzt besondern Nutzen, einen klaren Gedanken in Finsterniß und Dunkelheit einzuhüllen'.

6 For the best exposition and analysis of Enlightenment semiotics and aesthetics cf. still Wellbery D., *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: 1984).

on, to borrow a phrase coined by Elaine Scarry, a 'body in pain'⁷ that is not Christ's—whose body, when he makes a rare appearance in the essay, is presented as the paradigm of the ugly and the disgusting.⁸ I contend, therefore, that the transparency of the aesthetic sign and the separation of painting and poetry, which the *Laocoon* essay and other texts belonging to the emerging discipline of aesthetics advocate, go hand in hand with the secularization of art during the Enlightenment. Conversely, the conjunction of semiotic opacity and aesthetic bi- or even multi-mediality in Baroque art that forms such emblems, figural poetry, etc. is, I would argue, to a large degree grounded in a theological framework from which Enlightenment aesthetics sought to emancipate itself. The following essay seeks to undo some of the conceptual censure and displacement performed by Enlightenment aesthetics in the name of the secularization of art and literature, and to excavate the religious and theological underpinnings of one particularly 'Baroque' art form, the bi-medial genre of the emblem. It will, thus, examine the concept of aesthetic sign at work in Early Modern emblematics and, more generally, the underlying ideology of representation that is ultimately rooted, as I will argue, in incarnational theology.

Emblematic Grafting

A fitting place to start examining the Early Modern conceptualization of this genre is with its name: *emblemata*, which is a neologism coined by the genre's progenitor Andrea Alciato himself. In the preface of the *Emblematum liber* Alciato playfully situates his poetic products within a panoply of other diversions:

While boys are entertained by nuts and youths by dice, so playing-cards fill up the time of lazy men. In the festive season we hammer out these emblems, made by the distinguished hand of craftsmen. Just as one affixes trimmings to clothes and badges to hats, so it behooves every one of us to write in silent marks. Though the supreme emperor may give to

7 Scarry E., *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York – Oxford: 1985). Cf. also Richter S., *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain: Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, Moritz, Goethe* (Detroit: 1992).

8 For an elaboration of this line of interpretation cf. my "Enlightenment Aesthetics and the Eucharistic Sign: Lessing's *Laocöon*", in Wandel L.P. (ed.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (Leiden: 2014) 489–507.

you, for you to own, precious coins and finest objects of the ancients, I myself shall give, one poet to another, paper gifts: take these, Konrad, the token of my love.⁹

It will be impossible to account for all aspects of the Humanistic textual play at work here, and thus I will restrict myself to highlighting the metaphorical field into which Alciato embeds his emblems. Alciato likens the fashioning of emblems to metal working. He extends this metallurgical simile when he calls emblems 'paper gifts' that one poet gives to another analogous to the emperor giving 'precious coins.' The second simile of emblems as 'trimmings to clothes' or 'badges to hats' further stresses their belonging to the sphere of *Kunsthandwerk* (arts and crafts). This figuration of emblems as badges which can be transferred to different vestimentary items seems to have been central to Alciato's conceptualization of the emblem, since it recurs in a letter to his fellow Humanist Francesco Calvo in which he describes his *libellum* in the following manner:

A book of epigrams, to which I have given the title *Emblemata*; for I describe in the individual epigrams something taken either from history or from nature in such a way that it comes to mean something pleasant, after which painters, goldsmiths, and founders can fashion objects which we call badges and which we fasten on our hats, or else bear as trade-marks [...].¹⁰

9 *The Memorial Web Edition in Latin and English of Alciato's Book of Emblems*. Cf. <http://www.mun.ca/alciato/test1.html> [August 21, 2014]:

Dum pueros iuglans, iuvenes dum tessera fallit:

Detinet, et segnes chartula picta viros.

Haec nos festivis Emblemata cudimus horis

Artificium illustri signaque facta manu:

Vestibus ut torulos, petasis ut figere parmas,

Et valeat tacitis scribere quisque notis.

At tibi supremus pretiosa nomismata Caesar,

Et veterum eximias donet habere manus,

Ipse dabo vati chartacea munera vates,

Quae, Chonrade, mei pignus amoris habe.

10 Cited in Homann H., *Studien zur Emblemantik des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Utrecht: 1971) 125: 'Singulis enim epigrammatibus aliquid describo, quod ex hixtoria [sic], vel ex rebus naturalibus aliquid elegans significet, unde pictores, aurifices, fusores, id genus conficere possint, quae scuta appellamus et petasis figimus, vel pro insignibus gestamus [...].'

Since Alciato has been so parsimonious in commenting on the book that made him famous, these short passages have received much scholarly attention. Bernhard Scholz has reminded us that Alciato speaks of a book of epigrams that he has given the title “*Emblemata*”. *Emblema* has therefore the status of a proper name and singular term rather than a generic designation.¹¹ Accordingly, Alciato’s emblems belong to the epigrammatic genre and are distinguished from common epigrams by their ekphrastic and evidentiary quality in that they simultaneously evoke a (mental) image and a (pleasant) meaning. But again, central to the emblematic process of evocation and signification is a certain transferability or citationality, since the emblem’s ekphrastic epigrammaticity is the condition of possibility for their vestimentary adaptability.

By persistingly relating emblems to *Kunsthandwerk* Alciato is merely mindful of the usage of *emblema* in classical Latin. As Hessel Miedema showed in a seminal essay almost forty years ago, *emblema* ‘is always a technical term for objets d’art and is used of inlaid work’.¹² Such emblematic ornamentation can be applied to a number of different materials, stone, wood, and most importantly metal: ‘These ornamental pieces, which are today conceived of as appliques, i.e., reliefs soldered onto a vessel, were considered of greater value than the tableware itself and were, as were precious stones, jewels and other inlaid work, often removed for use elsewhere’.¹³ Guillaume Budé confirms this semantic dimension: ‘With the ancients too, emblemata were decorations on gold, silver or Corinth dishes, which could be taken off as desired, such as I do not believe are known at the present time’.¹⁴ And Hadrianus Junius distinguishes two forms of metal *emblemata*, on the one hand embossed silverware and on the other ‘removable ornamental work which may be taken off silver or gold tableware at will and without damaging it, and put on again’.¹⁵ All these definitions and characterizations have several structural features in common. *Emblemata* are hybrid aggregates in which one part is inserted into another part. Both parts differ in substance and value, and it is this value differential between both components that motivates the separability and transferability of the more valuable insert. Yet, things are less clear-cut than appears at

11 Scholz B.F., “‘Libellum composui epigrammaton cui titulum feci Emblemata’: Alciatus’s Use of the Expression *Emblema* Once Again”, *Emblematica* 1 (1986) 213–226, esp. 217.

12 Hessel Miedema, “The Term *Emblema* in Alciati”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968) 234–250, esp. 239. Cf. also Henebry C., “Writing with Dumb Signs: Memory, Rhetoric, and Alciato’s *Emblemata*”, *Daphnis* 10 (1996) 211–244, esp. 226ff.

13 Cited in Miedema, “The Term *Emblema*” 240.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

first glance. While their ornamentality seems to render *emblemata* extraneous compared to their ground, they actually lend it its value.

Originally, the Greek word ἔμβλημα, while following a similar logic, referred to a much wider range of objects and contexts, as it stands for ‘any mounted or inserted part, ranging from an insole in a shoe to a cultivated branch grafted on to a wild tree’.¹⁶ In his *Thesaurus Graecae linguae* Henry Estienne renders *emblema* as the ‘grafting of a cultivated shoot on to a wild one’;¹⁷ and his fellow humanist Ludovicus Coelius Rhodiginus defines *emblema*, even more generally, as ‘everything cultivated, when grafted on to what is uncultivated’.¹⁸ Thus, emblemization means the process of grafting a cultivated shoot or scion on wild and uncultivated stock. The addition of value that we identified as an essential moment of the emblem, is therefore the result of this cultivation. The cultural work that emblems do is literally the cultivation of uncultivated nature.¹⁹ Yet, the relation between stock and scion is far from unilinear as both supplement each other. While the uncultivated stock is ennobled by grafting a cultivated scion onto it, it in turn lends the graft vitality and resistance. Thus, both profit from this quasi-symbiotic relationship. But despite the intimate exchange between stock and scion their relation remains somewhat arbitrary and superficial. As the prefatory poem to Konrad Peutinger indicates, emblematic grafting is a playful process and transplantability is actually highly desirable. It is precisely this ludic arbitrariness which accounts for the cultural versatility of emblematic grafting. The metaphoro-logic of grafting also sheds new light on the interplay of word and image within the emblem. Emblemization involves the grafting of *logoi* onto images or, more abstractly, the implantation of meaning. In short, what the metaphor of grafting illustrates is the emblem’s very process of signification.

We do not need Derrida to remind us of the textual logic and economy of emblematic grafting or, more precisely, the kinship between grafting and the graphic.²⁰ One need only turn to classical rhetoric. Quintilian disapprovingly tells of ‘some people, by no means undistinguished in public life, [who] have

16 Cited in *ibid.*, 239.

17 Cited in *ibid.*, footnote 24.

18 Cited in *ibid.*, 239.

19 For the metaphoro-logic of grafting cf. Wirth U., “Kultur als Propfung. Propfung als Kulturmodell: Prolegomena zu einer *Allgemeinen Greffologie*”, in: idem (ed.), *Impfen, Propfen, Transplantieren* (Berlin: 2011) 9–28.

20 Cf. Derrida J., *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (Chicago – London: 1981) 355–359. Cf. also Culler J., *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: 1983) 134–156.

been known to write these topics out, carefully commit them to memory, and have them ready at hand so as to embellish their extempore speeches with insertions (*emblematis*) when necessary'.²¹ Thus, rhetorical emblems are prefabricated elements of speech that can be plugged into a seemingly extemporaneous discourse whenever the need arises. As the tone and context of this passage makes clear, classical rhetoric looked at such rhetorical emblematising with disdain, since these prefabricated pieces always remain irreducibly alien and arbitrary. In other words, they neither fit the context of the speech harmoniously nor does the speaker appropriate them organically. In contrast, the 'Asiatic' Baroque (in terms of aesthetic style) instrumentalized the emblem's hybridity and obscurity in order to increase their signification force. Furthermore, to a Baroque sensibility the medial transposition between word and image seemed to gloss over the fissures and lend it organicity. The metaphors of grafting, thus, reflects the seemingly contradictory nature of emblem's bi-mediality of being simultaneously arbitrary and natural.

A Just Proportion

The botanical or, more generally, biological metaphors of grafting, which gave this bi-medial genre its name, stand in close relation to the organological metaphors that its first theorizations invoked to conceptualize and illustrate its peculiar structure and functioning.²² According to Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo delle imprese* of 1555, the treatise initiating the theoretical debate about bimodal art forms like *impresas* and emblems, a good *impresa* requires, first of all, a 'just proportion of body and soule'.²³ The soul, he explains, is the motto, whereas the body is the *pictura*. Neither a soul without an image, nor a body without a *inscriptio* could constitute a perfect *impresa*. In a similar vein Scipione Ammirato writes in his dialogue *Il Rota overa delle imprese*: "The *impresa* stands

21 Quintilian, *The Orator's Education/Institutio Oratoriae* 11.4.27, ed.—trans. D.A. Russell (Cambridge, Mass. – London: 2001): 'ut quidam neque ignobiles in officiis civilibus scriptos eos memoriaeque diligentissime mandatos in promptu habuerint, ut, quotiens esset occasio, extemporales eorum dictiones his velut emblematis exornarentur [...]'.
 22 For the following cf. also Mansueto D., "The Impossible Proportion: Body and Soul in Some Theories of the Impresa", *Emblematica* 12 (2002) 5–29; and Loach J., "Body and Soul: A Transfer of Theological Terminology into the Aesthetic Realm", *Emblematica* 12 (2002) 31–60.

23 Cited after the English translation in Daniel Samuel, *The worthy tract of Paulus Iovius, contayning a Discourse of rare inuentions, both Militarie and Amorous called Imprese*, ed. N.K. Farmer, Jr. (London, S. Waterson: 1585; repr. ed., Delmar, NY: 1976), B.iiiiv.

for man [...] who has in himself both soul and body'. Thus, just as 'after death [...] that body which remains is called corpse, not man', so 'that picture or image [...] which lacks the motto, will be called painting, not *impresa*'.²⁴ The German Baroque author Georg Philip Harsdörffer draws on this Italian discussion when he writes in his *Frauenzimmer Gesprächsspiele* [roughly translated "Women's Conversation Games"]:

My opinion is, as others have said before, that an emblem (*Sinnbild*) consists in one or more images and a few words: the latter are the soul or the living spirit, and the former are the body. [...] Just as man has two essential parts, the soul and the body, and in their mortality neither can exist without the other.²⁵

According to Harsdörffer the image is figured as the body which is animated or ensouled by the accompanying words, consisting in the *inscriptio* or title as well as the *subscriptio* or explanatory verses, as the 'living spirit'.²⁶ Following the Paulinian logic, so familiar to a Protestant like Harsdörffer, the dead 'letter' of the image is quickened by the spirit of the word. Or put slightly differently, in conjoining word with image the emblem stages the embodiment or incarnation of sense. In a move reminiscent of incarnational theology Harsdörffer parallels the body and the soul of the emblem with Aristotelian categories: 'To say it directly: the image is the matter, and the text [Harsdörffer actually says 'writing' or 'script[-ure]'] the form; or the former is the thing that is formed by the accompanying word. The constellation of both is the analogy or comparison

24 Cited in Mansueto, "The Impossible Proportion" 8: 'L'impresa sta in vece dell' uomo; e tanto noi diciamo alcuno esser uomo, quanto ha in sé anima e corpo; ché dopo morte sapete, secondo voi altri aristotelici, che quel corpo che rimane si chiama cadavero e non uomo. E però quella pittura o imagine o disegno di qual si voglia cosa che sia, la qual è senza motto, sie chiamerà pittura e non impresa'.

25 Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprächsspiele* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Endter: 1644) IV 170: 'Meine Meinung ist / wie zu anderer Zeiten gedacht worden / daß ein Sinnbild [...] bestehen sol in einem oder mehr Bildern / und etlich wenig Worten: dieses sol die Seele oder der lebende Geist / jenes der Leib seyn. [...] Gleichwie der Mensch zwey wesentliche Theil hat / die Seele und den Leib / deren eines ohne das andere in dieser Sterblichkeit nicht bestehen kan'.

26 Cf. also Bannasch B., "Von der 'Tunkelheit' der Bilder. Das Emblem als Gegenstand der Meditation bei Harsdörffer", in Kurz G. (ed.), *Meditation und Erinnerung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: 2000) 307–325.

(*Gleichnis*) which the whole invention intends'.²⁷ The image provides the matter to be formed and informed by the words—here in their medial manifestation of writing. Harsdörffer, thus, figures the process of signification as the (in-)formation of the emblem's body by the soul.

To illustrate this informational or, better, incarnational logic Harsdörffer offers an emblem of his own invention:

Es sind in demselben zween Engel / deren der eine singet / der andere auf der Lauten spielt: Dieser gleichet der Materi / welche nicht könnte verstanden werden / wann nicht der andere mit deutliche Worten beystimmte / und solcher Stimme Forme gebe oder gestaltete. Daher dann auch in diesem Verstand bleiben kan die Beyschrift [Fig. 9.1]:²⁸



FIGURE 9.1 *Majuscule* in Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Endter: 1644), vol. IV, 173. Engraving. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.

27 Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV 172: 'Aber ohne Verblümung darvon zu reden / so sei das Bild die Materie / die Schrift die Form / oder jenes der Gezeug welchen das Beywort gestalte; die Verfassung dieser beiden sey das Gleichniß / dahin die gantze Erfindung ziele'.

28 Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV 173: 'It consists of two angels, of which the one sings and the other plays the lute. The latter resembles matter which could not be understood, if the other would not accompany him with clear words and shape and form him with his voice. In this sense, it can have the motto: "My self's other I" '.

This emblem's *pictura*, which consists of little more than a majuscule, stages the relation between image and word: the angel playing the lute representing the unformed matter and the angel vocalizing the words in the hymnal embodying the defining or, literally, 'beystimmende' force which gives form. The relation between matter and form, image and word is conceptualized by Harsdörffer's motto as one of identity and difference: *Mein selbst ander ich*. The first interlocutor tries to concretize this rather abstract formula by identifying the two angels with 'two spouses which ought to have one mouth and mind' and, thereby, echoes a famous Christological formula. As an emblem both angels, body and soul, form an inseparable union—and yet they are two. Harsdörffer idiosyncratic emblem hints at the connection between the metaphors of grafting that inspired Alciato and the incarnational model of the emblem as a composite of body and soul developed by its theorists. In *Romans* 11 Paul describes the relation of Judaism and Christianity as one of grafting. The Jews form the branches of a noble olive tree that has its roots in Abraham. Because of their 'unbelief' some of these branches were 'broken off' by God (*Romans* 11:20), and instead branches of a wild olive tree, that is the Christians, were 'grafted in' (*Romans* 11:19). From a horticultural perspective it makes, of course, little sense to graft a wild scion on a cultivated stock, but under the auspices of salvational history the 'corrupt' tree needs to be renewed by the wild and, thus, uncorrupted young branches. Just as the Christians are grafted onto Jewish stock, Christ is grafted onto the line of David and Abraham, and his divinity is grafted onto Adam's humanity; and if we shift back to the theory of emblems: the immortal soul is grafted onto its mortal body, sense is grafted onto matter, and words grafted onto images.

The Evidence of Grafting

The pivotal operation enabling emblematic grafting is rhetorical. As Alciato writes in the letter to Calvo, which I have cited earlier, his epigrams 'describe [...] something taken either from history or from nature in such way that it comes to mean something pleasant, after which painters and other artists 'can fashion objects'. What defines emblematic epigrams is, as I mentioned before, their ekphrastic quality.²⁹ Whatever they signify visual artists can convert into art objects that are transferable and portable. What remains implicit in Alciato's

29 Henebry, "Writing with Dumb Signs" 220ff., makes this point emphatically. Cf. also Campe R., "Questions of Emblematic Evidence: Phaeton's Disaster, with Reference to Pierre Legendre's Theory of Emblems", in Wygant A. (ed.), *New Directions of Emblem Studies* (Glasgow: 1999) 1–24, esp. 15ff.

brief remark, but is nevertheless essential, is the relais of the mental image that is evoked by the ekphrastic epigram. The accomplishment of the visual artist is, therefore, to give the mental images a material form; a material form which derives its portability from the ultimate mobility of mental images. In rhetorical theory the evocation of mental images through discourse is usually designated by the Greek paronyms *enargeia* and *energeia* and their Latin calque *evidentia*.

According to Quintilian, *evidentia* belongs to the *figurae in mentis* and denotes the persuasive effect of a cluster of rhetorical figures and tropes that are employed by the orator to produce clear and vivid mental images, such as *illustratio*, *demonstratio*, *hypotyposis*, *ekphrasis*, *subiectio sub oculos*, *repraesentatio*, and others. What distinguishes *evidentia* or 'vivid illustration' from *perspicuitas* or 'mere clearness' though, is its force, 'since the latter merely lets itself be seen (*patet*), whereas the former thrusts itself upon our notice (*se quodammodo ostendit*)'. Quintilian describes the 'ostentatious thrust' of *evidentia* in the following manner:

The result will be *enargeia*, what Cicero calls *illustratio* and *evidentia*, a quality which makes us seem not so much to be talking about something but exhibiting it. Emotions will ensue just as if we were present at the event itself.³⁰

Enargeia or *evidentia* ensues when vivid description induces listeners or readers to experience the event without textual mediation and, thus, transforms them into eye witnesses. Rousing 'in the reader's mind all the emotions of dismay and disturbance which the eyewitness felt', *evidentia* reveals itself to be central to classical rhetoric as a *techne* of affective manipulation. For, as Quintilian states:

It is a great virtue to express our subject clearly and in such a way that it seems to be actually seen. A speech does not adequately fulfil its purpose or attain total domination it should have if it goes no further than the ears, and the judge feels that he is merely being told the story of the matters he has to decide, without their being brought out and displayed to the mind's eye.³¹

30 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoriae* VI.2.32: 'Insequetur, quae a Cicerone inlustratio et evidentia nominatur, quae non tam dicere videtur quam ostendere, et adfectus non aliter quam si rebus ipsis intersimus sequentur'.

31 Ibid. VIII.3.61–63: 'Magna virtus res de quibus loquimur clare atque ut cerni videantur enuntiare. Non enim satis efficit neque, ut debet, plene dominatur oratio si usque ad

The force of the verbal utterance manifests itself in the mental images that it evokes. The verbal medium reaches maximum efficacy in the moment it erases itself and effects an act of seeing. In other words, *evidentia*'s persuasive force is unleashed by concealing its own rhetorical artifice. If it turns speech into demonstration, listening into seeing, word into image, then emblems are, in a way, evidence in action. The *pictura* is literally put before the reader's eyes, the mental image evoked by the word is materialized.

Martin Luther and the Evidence of 'Christum'

Only six years before the publication of Alciato's *Emblematum liber*, Martin Luther invokes this *virtus elocutionis* to defend religious images in his polemical treatise "Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament" ("Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments") with which he condemns the iconoclastic riots that had been instigated 1525 by his professorial colleague and fellow reformer Andreas Karlstadt while he was in hiding on the Wartburg. Luther fires an argumentative broadside against Karlstadt's iconoclasm. On political grounds he brands it as seditious and undermining authority, on theological grounds he brings up his biggest gun by claiming that iconoclasm as framed by Karlstadt is just another form of good works. His most fundamental argument, though, is an anthropological one and concerns the representational logic of mental images or, put rhetorically, the play of *evidentia*:

Of this I am certain, that God desires to have his works heard and read, especially the Passion of our Lord. But it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in my mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on the cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes, and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God.³²

aures valet, atque ea sibi iudex de quibus cognoscit narrari credit, non exprimi et oculis ostendi'.

32 *Luther's Works*, eds. J. Pelikan – H.T. Lehman (Philadelphia: 1959), vol. 40.2, 99ff.: 'So weys ich auch gewis, das Gott wil haben, man solle seyne werck hören und lesen, sonderlich das leyden Christi. Soll ichs aber hören odder gedencken, so ist myrs unmöglich, das ich nicht

For Luther this *figura in mentis* is not only responsible for the 'bilde ym hertzen,' but legitimates also the image 'ynn augen'.³³ If the utterance of the name or word 'Christum' evokes 'ynn meym hertzen eyen manns bilde, das am creutze henget,' then external, material images are only a the replication of internal, immaterial images. In fact, it is the evidentiary force of the *verbum Dei* or the name of Christ that guarantees the legitimacy of all image production. On the one hand, it establishes a hierarchy between external and internal, corporeal and mental images by securing the primacy of the latter. In fact, external images which have their seat in the eyes are much less consequential than internal images which reside in the heart. External images are indifferent and a matter of Christian freedom. Luther criticizes Karlstadt and his iconoclastic cronies for erecting idols in their hearts while breaking external images. Thus, he turns iconoclasm on its head by claiming that it is a veiled form of idolatry. On the other hand, *evidentia* binds the image—be it internal or external—to the Word. Born from the divine Word any image of the 'manns bilde, das am creutze henget' thus never fails to signify or—to use Luther's simile—to mirror the divine Word.

In Luther's simile, word and image are intimately and inextricably joined in a reflexive relationship. Uttering or hearing the word 'Christum' evokes, 'whether I want or not,' 'in my heart the image of a man, who hangs on the cross—just as my face delineates itself in the water when I cast a glance into it'. Thus, the image of Christ in the heart, any image in the mind, reveals itself to be the reflex or mirror image of the Word/word—quasi an optical effect of language. Insofar as the evidentiary force of the divine Word is responsible for the generation of images, it is beyond the control of the subject. The 'manns bilde, das am creutze henget' appears unbidden, making the subject *qua* spectator the eyewitness of a visual event or *Ereignis*³⁴ that happens to it. In fact, the simile suggests that the iconicity of the Christ image is a function of indexicality, or put in the terminology of speech act theory: mental and corporeal images of Christ are a function of the performative force of uttering his

ynn meym hertzen sollt bilde davon machen, denn ich wolle, odder wolle nicht, wenn ich Christum höre, so entwirfft sich ynn meym hertzen eyen manns bilde, das am creutze henget, gleich als sich meyn andlitz naturlich entwirfft yns wasser, wenn ich dreyn sehe, Ists nu nicht sunde sondern gut, das ich Christus bilde ym hertzen habe, Warumb sollts sunde seyn, wenn ichs ynn augen habe? syntemal das hertze mehr gillt denn die augen und weniger soll mit sunden befleckt seyn denn die augen, als das da ist der rechte sitz und wonunge Gottes'. Cf. Luther M., *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: 1883) vol. 18, 83.

33 For the following cf. also Koerner J.L., *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago – London: 2004) 160–168.

34 In the etymological sense of *Er-Äugnis* as something that gives itself to be seen.

name. The enunciation of signifier 'Christum' brings about the image as signified, or, put differently, 'Christum' enacts and produces that which it names.

Not coincidentally, the production of images is tied to the 'Leyden Christi' or Christ's body in pain. Luther describes here not only what was self-evident for Christian art, but moreover suggests why it has to be that way. The imagining as well as the imaging of the Word 'Christum', or put more technically *evidentia*'s transformation of the linguistic into the visual, resembles and replicates the moment when the Word becomes flesh. The utterance of the word 'Christum' evokes an image of his human form, much as the God's Word became flesh in its referent. With the convergence of these two movements the image becomes—so to say—the body of the word. After all, what Luther sees when he hears or thinks the word 'Christ' is his suffering body on the cross; what he sees in the water is his own body. It should not be surprising that *evidentia*'s Greek counterparts *enargeia* and *energeia* anticipate the conjunction of these two moments, the word becoming image and the Word becoming flesh. As Graham Zanker observes: 'The adjective ἐναργής is, of course, very common from Homer to the end of the classical period. There it means 'visible, palpable in bodily shape especially of the gods appearing in their own forms'.³⁵ Moreover, *energeia*, as the figure which brings 'before the eyes' and makes 'the lifeless living', also refers to another form of incarnation, namely the personification of abstract concepts. Thus, the incarnation not only unites word and image, but the evidentiary force of the Word enables the reciprocal transformation of both media.

Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg's Meditations on the Passion

My last two pieces of evidence, an emblem and a figural poem by the German Baroque poet Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, bring the different strands I have been examining together. The emblem, titled "Nichts als Jesus" ("Nothing but Jesus"),³⁶ prefaces the first of Greiffenberg's twelve *Meditations on the Passion* (*Des Allerheiligst- und Allerheilsamsten Leidens und Sterbens Jesu Christi / Zwölf Andächtige Betrachtungen*) and must, therefore, be read not only programmatically but, similar to Harsdörffer's, as a meta-emblem which spells out and reflects

35 Zanker G., "Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 124 (1981) 297–311, esp. 307.

36 Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Des Allerheiligst- und Allerheilsamsten Leidens und Sterbens Jesu Christi Zwölf andächtige Betrachtungen* (Nuremberg, Johann Hofmann: 1672), fol. 2 verso & 3 recto.



FIGURE 9.2 *Frontispiece in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, Des Allerheiligst- und Allerheilsamsten Leidens und Sterbens Jesu Christi Zwölf andächtige Betrachtungen* (Nuremberg, Johann Hofmann: 1672), fol. 2 verso & 3 recto. Printed text & engraving. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.



Erklärung des Tittel-Kupfers.

Esch auß/ die ganze Welt. Die Tafel der Ge-
 danken
 rein werd gewischet ab. Nichts bleib / als JE-
 sus Christ.
 Nichts will ich dulden sonst. Es soll nicht in den
 schranken
 der Angedächtnis seyn / als der / der Alles ist.
 Es mag die wiß-begier viel schönes wesen reizen:
 mich laßt mein JESU nur / vor tausend wiß-
 senschaft.
 Die Welt mag / wie nach Geld / nach Kunst und
 Weißheit gehen:
 Ich will und weiß sonst nichts / als seine Creuzes-
 kraft.
 Der Gall- und Essig-Schwamm leich' auß all' El-
 telkeiten:
 nur der Gekreuzigte bleib stehn in meinem Sinn.
 Wie weit / wann sie allein / die Allheit sich aus-
 breiten
 und alles wenden kan/das siht man klar hiertan.
 Die Allheit ich allein will im Gedächtnis haben:
 so hab ich alls / und sie gekreuzigt noch darzu.
 Nur unerreichlicher sind ihre Gnaden-Gaben /
 je mehr sie angehäufft. In ihm / ist meine Ruh.

the meditative matrix of the following “Passionsbetrachtungen”—which are in turn introduced by individual emblems relating to the topic at hand [Fig. 9.2].³⁷

In its *pictura* we see a female figure posing as a painter in front of a canvas mounted on an easel, designated as ‘Tafel der Gedanken’ or ‘table of the mind’. Instead of a brush she is holding a formless object which the *subscriptio* identifies as a vine sponge (‘Gall=und Essig=Schwamm’). She has fixed her gaze on the upper half of the canvas which is dominated by the figure of Christ on the cross. The epiphanic character of his appearance is underscored by the dramatic parting of the clouds. The lower half is vacant or, more precisely, almost vacant as it is still possible to discern a number of vague and blurred figures which the sponge has not yet been able to wipe away. What this emblem stages is the evidentiary generation of images in spiritual contemplation: meditation as painting on the interior ‘Tafel der Gedanken’ or, as Jerome designates it in his

37 Cf. Thums B., “Zur Topographie der *memoria* in frühneuzeitlicher Mystik: Catharina Regina von Greiffenbergs ‘Geistliche Gedächtnisorte’”, in Kurz G. (ed.), *Meditation und Erinnerung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: 2000) 251–271.

commentary on Ezekiel: *pingere in corde nostro*.³⁸ Similar to Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, this image production has a privileged object: Christ or, more precisely, 'nichts als Jesus'. Yet, in contrast to other similar images depicting meditative image-making,³⁹ both in its literal and spiritual sense, Greiffenberg adds a small but important twist. Given that the only instrument the personification of meditation has at her disposal to make the image of Christ appear is the vine sponge, one of the traditional *arma Christi*, it seems not too farfetched to conclude that the painting of meditative images on the 'Tafel der Gedanken' is a function of the erasure of images 'der ganzen Welt'. Reminiscent of Descartes' total and universal doubt, all other mental representations have to be wiped away so as to make Christ's image appear as if by itself. Meditating on 'Jesus' has the power of apotropaically exorcising all worldly images.

Greiffenberg's meta-emblem stages the parallel movement of incarnation and evidentiary image production. The word that becomes image replicates the Word becoming flesh or, put more precisely, the 'Gall=und Essig=Schwamm', the tool of passion, paints the 'Gekreuzigten' which is the sole object of these *Passionsbetrachtungen*. Moreover, it suggests that Christ stands behind all mental figures as the ground on which they take shape—and, in the process, occlude him. The image of Christ hidden under other mundane images is, of course, nothing other than the *imago Dei* grafted onto the meditator's 'Tafel der Gedanken'. Thus, the divine Word informs the 'Tafel der Gedanken' figured as the canvas of a painting which is also, given that this is a meta-emblem, the *pictura* of the emblem, as well as of the other emblems prefacing Greiffenberg's *Meditations on the Passion*.

My second example from Greiffenberg's oeuvre is in a sense, although a pattern poem, also emblematic. "Über den gekreuzigten JESUS" is a meditation on Christ's passion and the soteriological efficacy of the blood he spilt for man.⁴⁰ The evidentiary image production starts with the poem's title that, despite its simplicity, is highly ambiguous. The 'über' (the missing *Umlaut* is quite common in the seventeenth century) can mean both 'about' and 'above.' By being positioned literally above what the title is about, it enacts visually what it denotes linguistically. Such performative enactment of linguistic reference

38 Cf. Carruthers M., *Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: 1998) 133–135. See also Melion W.S., *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: 2009).

39 I am thinking here of the frontispiece to the appendix, entitled "Orbita probitatis", of Jan David's *Veridicus Christianus* (Antwerpen, Plantin: 1603). Cf. Freedberg D., *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago – London: 1991) 183–186.

40 Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Geistliche Sonette, Lieder und Gedichte zu gottseeligem Zeitvertreib* (Nuremberg, Endter: 1662) 403.

XLVII.

Über den gekreuzigten
JESUS.

Seht der König König hängen/
und uns all mit Blut besprennen.
Seine Wunden seyn die Brunnen/
draus all unser Heil gerunnen.

Seht, Er strecket seine Hand aus / uns alle zu umfassen;
hat/en sein liebheißes Herz uns zu drucken / Lustverlangen.
Ja er neigt sein liebste Haupt / uns begierig mit zu küssen,
Seine Sinnen und Gebärden / sind auf unser Heil gestossen.

Seiner Seiten offen = stehen /
macht sein gnädigs Herz uns sehn:
wann wir schauen mit den Sinnen/
sehen wir uns selbst darinnen.

So viel Strieme/so viel Wunden/
als an seinen Leib gefunden /
so viel Sieg-und Segens-Quellen
wolt Er unsrer Seel befehlen.
zwischen Himmel und der Erden
wolt Er aufgeopffert werden:
daß Er Gott und uns vergliche.
uns zu stärken / Er verbliche:

Ja sein Sterben/ hat das Leben
mir und aller Welt gegeben.
Jesu Christ! dein Tod und Schmerzen
leb' und schweb mir stets im Herzen!

Spruch

FIGURE 9.3 *Pattern poem in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, Geistliche Sonette, Lieder und Gedichte zu gottseeligem Zeitvertreib (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Endter: 1662) 403. Print Collection, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel.*

also extends to the title's referent—which is the poem as much as its subject. Thus, the poem that stands under the title referring to the crucified Jesus figures his very body with its linguistic material. The absent referent is presented in the pattern that the words form on the page before the reader's eyes so that s/he can see what is described [Fig. 9.3].

The first line of the poem, 'See the king of kings hang' ('Seht der König König hängen'), makes clear that the image forming and formed before the reader's eyes is evoked by the evidentiary force of the words; a force that ultimately

originates in the Word incarnate denoted by the title. In fact, the poem enacts the incarnation of Word by verbally and visually delineating the body of 'crucified JESUS' with the body of the text. For instance, the second 'Seht' directs the reader's eyes to see 'He reaches out his hands to embrace us all' ('Seht / Er strecket seine Händ aus / uns alle zu umfängen') where Jesus' hands would have been nailed to the cross formed by the poem's letters. Similarly, the poem mentions Jesus' 'Haupt' or 'head' in the exact mid-point of the lines forming the crossbeam and, thus, positions it where most images of the crucified Christ would have placed it. Thus, denotation becomes deixis, linguistic signification an act of pointing; and this act of pointing lets what is signified be present here and now.⁴¹ The most conspicuous instance of the poetic text embodying its sense concerns the performative evocation of Christ's side wounds:

His side's standing-open
 Lets us see his merciful heart:
 When we look with the senses
 We see ourselves in it.

The nominalized verb 'offen=stehen' performs what it signifies: the hyphen separates the 'offen' from the 'stehen' and, thus, simulates the gaping wound that is here placed on the left side; the side where the heart is located; and the same side on which Albrecht Dürer placed it in his woodcut depicting the deposition scene from his *Large Passion* cycle. The 'offen=stehen' is doubly split as the hyphen is represented, which is not uncommon in Baroque typography, by what we would call an equal sign. Its two lines, thus, represent the edges of the wound revealing Christ's heart. This double fissure marks and reflects the difference between the two modes of seeing, one mental or, better, spiritual and the other corporeal that the *virtus elocutionis* of *evidentia* mediates. The words' and Word's evidentiary force lets the spiritual eye see the heart between the lines where it is normally hidden in the textual body and, thereby, activates the soteriological efficacy residing in its blood. But if 'we look with the senses' alone the text remains opaque and merely reflects ourselves. The materiality

41 A cross poem by Siegmund von Birken, Greiffenberg's mentor and editor, employs such deictic denotation even more explicitly. Its first line reads: 'Alas! This place [...].' And instead of the 'seht', which does the work of evidentiary evocation in Greiffenberg's poem, Birken repeatedly uses 'hier', that is, 'here', to enact visually and materially what the poems says. Cf. Birken Siegmund von, *Teutsche Rede- bind- und Dicht-kunst* (Nuremberg, C. Riegel & C. Gerhard: 1679) 145. See also Plotke S., *Gereimte Bilder. Visuelle Poesie im 17. Jahrhundert* (München: 2009) 129–136.

of the textual image, thus, resists and enables the performative presentation of the Word made flesh. Greiffenberg's emblem and pattern poem enact the dynamic conjoining of word and image that Luther described and, thereby, unleash the salvational force residing in these aesthetic artifacts; and both are emblematic in the sense that the incarnation enacted in the aesthetic process is imagined/imaged as a complex process of grafting.

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PART 3

Literary Figurations of the Incarnation



From Negative Painting to Loving Imprint in Pierre de Bérulle's *Discours* (1623)

Agnès Guiderdoni

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the mystery of the Incarnation was particularly favored in French spiritual circles.¹ It usually took the form of a Christocentrism or a special cult to the Divine Child. A mixture of influences from the newly reformed Carmelites, Jesuit spirituality, and the wide diffusion of the late medieval Northern mystical writers, and their consequent promotion of an emotional spirituality, helps to explain this focus on the Incarnation mystery. Among the prolific spiritual writers of the time who favored the Incarnation devotion, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629) stands out as its champion. Bérulle, who was founder of the Congregation of the Oratory and brought to France Carmelites who introduced Teresian reforms into their order in France the first years of the seventeenth century, was called by Urban VIII the ‘apostle of the incarnated Word’.²

Bérulle understood Divine love to inform the relationship between the persons of the Trinity and man. He conceived this relationship complexly and subtly as a pictorial paradigm. In the present study—very much a work in progress—I will present Bérulle’s many variations on this central pictorial paradigm in his most famous work, the *Discours de l’état et des grandeurs de Jésus* published in 1623.³ I will show how very paradoxical his conception of painting applied to Christianity is, and how it contrasts to the art of printing.

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- 1 On this generally, see Bremond H., *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu’à nos jours*, nouvelle édition augmentée sous la direction de François Trémolières, vol. 1 (Grenoble: 2006), on Bérulle, 909–1088.
 - 2 Molien A., “Bérulle”, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (Paris: 1936–1995) vol. 1, col. 1551. See also Lescot R., *Pierre de Bérulle. Apôtre du Verbe incarné. Ses intuitions les plus lumineuses, ses textes les plus audacieux* (Paris: 2013).
 - 3 Bérulle Pierre de, *Discours de l’état et des grandeurs de Jésus, par l’union ineffable de la divinité avec l’humanité* (Paris, A. Estienne: 1623). I will use the critical edition by R. Lescot (Paris: 1996); all the quotations in this article refer to this edition. On the relationship between this paradigm and meditation, see Belin C., *La conversation intérieure : la méditation en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 2002) 195–202, and Ferrari A., *Figures de la contemplation : la « rhétorique divine » de Pierre de Bérulle* (Paris: 1997) 157–195.

In 1610, the Jesuit Louis Richeome in his *Tableaux sacrez* represented the history of salvation as the progressive emergence of a painting, and the passage from the Ancient to the New Law as the coloring, and the awakening of a mute and grey drawing:

Or Madame, l'invention et l'estoffe de ces tableaux n'est pas mienne, je n'y ay [mis] qu'un peu de langage : elle est du fils de Dieu qui jadis en a tiré les lineamens et pourfils sur la membrane, ou de la loy de nature (comme sont les quatre premiers) ou de son vieil Testament (comme sont les sept d'après), et s'estant faict homme, il a crayonné les deux penultièmes, et parachevé tant ceux-cy, que ceux-là, des traicts de sa propre main, sur l'instrument de sa nouvelle alliance en l'Eucharistie : et ce d'une divine façon. Car establisant ce haut et divin mystere [l'Eucharistie] en la place de tous les anciens sacrifices et Sacremens, il a mis les vives couleurs sur la vieille et precedente peinture, embelly toutes les parties du dessein jadis faict, donné corps à l'ombre vie au corps, et ame à la figure muette [...].

Or combien que ces vieux Sacremens et sacrifices figuratifs ayent perdu leur raison ou leur pratique materielle par l'establissement de la verité du nouveau, ils ont neantmoins leur rang et usage en l'Eglise Chrestienne que vostre Majesté leur pourra donner, et en recevoir fruit en deux belles façons. Premièrement si elle commande qu'ils soyent tirez par la main ouvrière des Peintres de sa Majesté qui faisans courir le pinceau sur un fond de peinture avec une grave gentillesse d'invention, vivacité de couleurs et perfection d'ombrages et de pourfils, sçauront artistement naisver l'entre-jent [sic] d'une figure : et donner sentiment et paroles aux choses muettes. Ainsi pourtraicts ils vous serviront d'une devote et riche tapisserie pour tendre votre cabinet d'oraison, et representans à vos yeux la memoire de ces histoires sacres, diront a votre ame, sans sonner mot, les merveilles du Createur.⁴

Recommending to the Queen, Mary of Medici, to draw actual paintings from his 'tableaux', which are both engraved plates and textual ekphrasis, in order to drape her mental oratory, Richeome conjoined mental and material representation of images and played with the elision of the difference between the two throughout his text. He thus implicitly envisaged the institution of the

4 Richeome Louis, *Tableaux Sacrez des Figures mystiques, du Tres-auguste Sacrifice et Sacrement de l'Eucharistie. Dédiez à la tres chrestienne Royne de France et de Navarre Marie de Medicis* (Paris, Laurent Sonnius: 1601), f. 6–7.

Eucharist as an art of painting, which in turn he conceived as an art of bringing to life, and precisely to spiritual life, the greyish figures of the Old Testament.

The use that Bérulle made of this pictorial paradigm, around the same period of time, was more directly and explicitly linked to his special devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation and to his Christocentrism, and it is far more nuanced. There were indeed reasons for Urban VIII to call Bérulle 'the apostle of the Incarnated Word'. He developed very early a personal and very emotional expression of his devotion to Christ, especially in the genre of the 'élévation', that is 'oration', 'praying address'. Consequently, he paved the way to the new devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and he wrote exalted addresses (*élévation*) to the Virgin and to Magdalene. Like Francis de Sales, whom he knew well, Bérulle used all the resources of poetics to express his faith and his theology.

In early seventeenth-century France, mystical enthusiasm thrived. Its main sources were the salon of Madame Acarie, who became a Carmelite under the name of Marie de l'Incarnation, Carthusians such as Dom Beaucousin—for a long time thought to be the French translator of the *Evangelic Pearl*—Capuchins, such as Benoit de Canfield, whom Bérulle had read, Francis de Sales, the Discalced Carmelites, and the writings of Teresa. Henri Bremond in his famous *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* speaks of 'mystical invasion'. Bérulle, heir to late medieval spirituality, was fascinated by Teresa's reforms to the Discalced Carmelites which he introduced in France and of which he became the first Superior General, serving in this role for the rest of his life. He also founded the Society of the Oratory of Jesus, following the model of the Italian Oratory of Philip Neri. He was thus well acquainted with both Spanish and Italian spiritual movements. Moreover, Bérulle had also been close to the Jesuits at some point in his youth and he was still in contact with them during the time they were expelled from France. In a nutshell, Bérulle stood at the crossroads of many of the spiritual currents and modes of faith of the time, which fed his thought and his spirituality, and from which he produced very personal and very rich work, entirely revolving around the incarnated Word.

It is particularly apt to speak of revolution, in the astronomical sense of the word, when considering Bérulle's Christocentrism, since he equates the position of Jesus in 'the science of salvation' to the position of the sun in the then recent and controversial Copernican conception of the universe:

Un excellent esprit de ce siècle [Copernic] a voulu maintenir que le soleil est au centre du monde, et non pas la terre ; qu'il est immobile et que la terre, proportionnellement à sa figure ronde, se meut au regard du soleil

[...]. Cette opinion nouvelle, peu suivie en la science des astres, est utile en la science du salut, car Jésus est le soleil immobile en sa grandeur et mouvant toute chose. [...] Jésus est le vrai centre du monde et le monde doit être en mouvement continuél vers lui. Jésus est le soleil de nos âmes duquel elles reçoivent toutes les grâces, les lumières et les influences. Et la terre de nos cœurs doit être en mouvement continuél vers lui, pour recevoir, en toutes nos puissances et parties, les aspects favorables et les bénignes influences de ce grand astre.⁵

Indeed, the sun is the dominant image of the *Discours*, together with light and shadow, stressing the most obvious feature of the Incarnation: it made the invisible visible to the world, as Bérulle repeated throughout the whole text.

Throughout he plays with the comparison of the actual, physical sun with the Sun as a metaphor for Christ. Discourse 8 is entirely based on this rhetorical play, moving back and forth between the false sun of the fables of the Ancients (namely the Egyptians) and the metaphorical divine sun.⁶ Or elsewhere, in Discourse 6, he explains creatures' dependence on one ray of light as much as on the whole sun for their connection to it.⁷ The modern editors of his *Complete Works* trace this later image to the platonic tradition (rather than the Aristotelian and Thomist tradition),⁸ giving an additional meaningful background to this solar imaginary, because it takes us into the realm of imitation and picturing. Bérulle's solar imaginary with regard to the Incarnation supports an image-based theory of imitation.

If both the biblical image of Christ as the light of the world and the understanding of the Incarnation as the invisible made visible may appear at first sight as typical, an extensive and close reading of the *Discours* soon makes clear that the case is more complex. The extent, the recurrence, and the sophistication of its use forbid any interpretation of it as either superficial or ornamental. The sun-image permeates the whole imaginary world of Bérulle, and it constitutes the foundations of his equating Christianity with the art of painting.⁹ It is, however, a very strange and somewhat negative conception—in the same sense as one speaks of negative theology, as we shall see.

5 Bérulle, *Discours* 85.

6 Bérulle, *Discours* 289 *sqq.*

7 Bérulle, *Discours* 236.

8 *Ibid.*, n. 2.

9 Bérulle, *Discours* 294.

The actual sun is first an image of Christ, not only because it governs and keeps alive all things on earth, or because it is at the center of the spiritual universe, but also because it cannot be painted:

L'art excellent de la peinture est une imitation de la nature qui va figurant à nos yeux, par son industrie, ce que Dieu a produit au monde hors de soi-même par sa puissance. Mais cet art ne paraît en rien moins que lorsqu'elle veut peindre le soleil, le plus noble des corps que Dieu ait formé en l'univers, tant il y a de vigueur, de splendeur et de clarté en cet astre céleste, qui ne peuvent être représentées par les ombres et les couleurs de la terre. Et l'impuissance de cet art ne paraît en rien tant qu'à la peinture de cet excellent objet, tant il y a de distance visible et sensible entre l'image et le prototype.¹⁰

Strikingly, from the outset, painting is doomed to fail ('powerlessness of this art') from its first attempt to render an image resembling the actual sun. There is no question here of the sun as the metaphor for Christ but the reader has been amply prepared, from the beginning of the book, to be able to make the connection by himself. So the sun is used here as a kind of syllepsis, being both the actual sun and the Christ. This failure of the art of painting is recurrent even though Bérulle claims that

La profession du Christianisme, à proprement parler, est un art de peinture, qui nous apprend à peindre : mais en nous-mesme, et non en un fonds estranger : et à y peindre un unique object. Car *nous n'avons point à peindre mais à effacer le monde en nous*, monde qui est le seul objet et de la vue des hommes et de l'art des peintres. Nous n'avons point à porter en nous l'image du vieil homme, mais celle du nouvel homme. Et, pour parler plus clairement, nous avons à y peindre un seul objet et le plus excellent objet qui soit, et *celui sur lequel la peinture a le moins d'atteinte*, c'est-à-dire, nous avons tous à peindre en nous-même un Soleil, le Soleil du soleil, [...]. Et nous avons à passer notre vie en ce bel et noble exercice, auquel nous sommes *exprimant et formant, en nous-mêmes*, celui que le Père éternel a exprimé en soi et qu'il a exprimé, au monde et au sein de la Vierge, par le nouveau mystère de l'Incarnation. Et en ce noble et divin exercice *notre ame est l'ouvriere, notre cœur est la planche, notre esprit est le pinceau*, et nos affections sont les couleurs qui doivent estre employées en cet art divin, et en cette peinture excellente.¹¹

10 Bérulle, *Discours* 294.

11 Ibid. My italics

As we see, at the very heart of his development of Christianity as an art of painting lay a contradiction and a paradox. First Bérulle denies this art the ability to achieve its proper goal: man must paint an object beyond the scope of painting ('the one for which painting is the least efficient'), but he nonetheless affirms that we have to paint within ourselves the divine Sun. There, the soul is the 'artisan', her heart is the plate or the canvas, and her spirit is her brush. Second, this art of painting is in fact an art of erasing ('we do not have to paint but to erase the world in us') in order to 'express and form' Christ in ourselves. This is a process of self re-figuration, but an imperfect one, as Bérulle continues:

Mais combien y a-t-il de distance entre cette imitation et image que nous formons de Jesus-Christ en nous-mesme [...] et son original et prototype ? Certes *rien ne peut peindre naïvement le soleil que le soleil mesme*, qui est le plus excellent peintre de l'univers, et le meilleur peintre de soy-mesme : car en luy exposant seulement une glace polie, il faict en un moment la vraye et vive image de soy-mesme en cette glace, que nul peintre ne peut imiter, et non pas mesme regarder, tant elle a de brillant et d'éclat, [...] : ainsi *Jesus est le vray peintre de soy-mesme*, et comme il a temps de rapports excellents au soleil, il a encore celui-ci de se *peindre lui-même et d'imprimer sa figure et ressemblance parfaite en l'âme*. Car, après que nous avons essayé de la peindre imparfaitement en nous par nos pensées et nos affections spirituelles en la vie de la terre, il veut se figurer lui-même bien plus parfaitement en nos cœurs et en nos esprits purifiés par sa grâce.¹²

So, after the soul tries imperfectly to paint Christ in itself, Christ himself, who is the best of all painters, paints *and* imprints his figure and resemblance in the soul. God has already been defined as a painter: a painter of the world and a painter of the Word, 'his master-piece': 'Aussi le même Dieu, se contemplant soi-même, aimant son unité, l'a voulu peindre encore plus vivement'.¹³ Here the art of painting applies to all the actors of the spiritual life, but it is differentiated ontologically with regard to the object painted, that is the Sun, reminiscent of the platonic cave: the ordinary painter can only paint mundane things and in no case spiritual objects; the Christian soul can and must paint an imperfect image of Christ, erasing all mundane things (painted by the ordinary painter); and finally Christ is the only true painter because he is the painter of himself by himself, creating acheropoietic images by direct reflec-

12 Bérulle, *Discours* 295. My italics.

13 Bérulle, *Discours* 75.

tion or impression (like the direct impression of Christ's face on the cloth of Veronica or the king Abgar). He is the only true painter because he is the only true image. There is a conflation between the painter and the painted object.

Another version of this idea can be found in a different context, the vision reported by an Ursuline who saw with her 'intellectual sight':

L'Humanité sacrée lui apparut tenant un pinceau, et le trempant dans son sang; il effaçait toutes les taches que le péché avait faites dans son cœur, il en fut tout purifié, et en même temps cet aimable Sauveur y retraçait son Image, que nous avons remarqué en cette chère Sœur par un renouvellement de l'imitation de ses vertus et de la parfaite soumission à la volonté de Dieu.¹⁴

This example shows us the potency of the image used by Bérulle and its application in spiritual life. What appears to the nun is not a pictorial image but Jesus as the painter and she as the image. Christ looks at and paints her: in fact, he is a very weird painter who erases her sinful human part in order to paint his own image; what transpires is an act of re-formation, of re-figuration, by which she has moved from the *regio dissimilitudinis* to the sphere of resemblance, to put it in Augustinian terms. The move is thus a negative gesture, out of which another image emerges. The example seems to be rooted in Dionysian negative theology, especially the acts of dispossession and abstraction that Dionysius describes in the well-known comparison in his *Mystical Theology*: 'We would be like sculptors who set out to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside they show up the beauty which is hidden'.¹⁵ In the case of the Ursuline nun, the hidden beauty is the true image, the resembling image; it is not actually revealed, but 'figured' in her heart. In addition to Dionysius, this operation recalls Master Eckhart's and Henry Suso's theorizations of negative theology in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, respectively, which were duly transmitted under various forms throughout the early modern period. Suso in particular expressed this theology as a dialectic process of the imago: 'Ein gelassener mensch muss *entbildet* werden von der creatur, *gebildet* werden mit Cristo, und *überbildet* in der gottheit'.¹⁶ The Ursuline's vision is an epitome of negative theology,

14 Le Brun J., « A corps perdu. Les biographies spirituelles féminines du XVII^e siècle », in Malamoud C. – Vernant J.P. (eds), *Corps des dieux* (Paris: 2003) 549.

15 Dionysius Areopagita, "Mystical theology", in *The complete works*, trans. C. Luibhead (New York: 1987) 138.

16 Seuse H., *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. K. Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: 1907, reprint, Frankfurt a.M.: 1961) 168.

articulated paradoxically through the thematization of the *imitatio Christi*—a thematization achieved by recourse to the full scope of metaphoric vision. At the end of the process, the sister has become a living *imitatio Christi* for herself and for the other sisters of the community.

Bérulle's art of painting is thus a negative one, an apophatic art of painting, since it is an art of invisibility and subtraction, the cataphatic dimension of painting being the privilege solely of Christ. Not only does he paint his image in the soul, but he also goes so far as to become the painter of himself *in* the Father as a self-portrait:

Car le Verbe se voyant être proprement l'image que le Père a formé de soi-même dans soi-même, il a voulu aussi *se peindre et se figurer lui-même dans un œuvre de ses mains* [...]. Et comme le Fils est l'image vive et l'idée parfaite de son Père en la Divinité, il veut être en ce sien œuvre *comme l'image vive et parfaite et soi-même*. [...] Tellement que nous voyons qu'en l'Eucharistie il est lui-même *la figure et l'image de lui-même* au Calvaire et, par sa présence établie en ce sacrement et sacrifice mystérieux sur l'autel de l'Eglise, il honore incessamment le grand sacrifice qu'il a fait de soi-même sur l'autel de la croix; aussi en ce rare œuvre, le premier et le suprême de ses mystères, il veut être comme l'image vive de soi-même en l'éternité et il veut lui-même *honorant et représentant son être et son état en la Divinité*, dans le nouvel être et état qu'il daigne prendre en son humanité.¹⁷

In defining more precisely the operations of Christ in the soul, Bérulle distinguishes between two kinds of paintings, which correspond to two kinds of lives:

Et, en ces deux sortes de peintures si différentes d'un même objet, se passent l'état et la conduite de l'âme en deux sortes de vie bien différentes: l'une, en laquelle, par son labeur et par son industrie accompagnée de la grâce, elle est opérante et imprimante en son fonds l'esprit et la vertu de Jésus; et l'autre, en laquelle Jésus même, par l'abondance et la plénitude de ses lumières et illustrations, agit et opère lui-même, et lui imprime son esprit et sa ressemblance.¹⁸

Even though he speaks of two kinds of *paintings* ('peinture'), one cannot help noticing a shift from painting to printing in the two lives. It seems indeed that

¹⁷ Bérulle, *Discours* 201–202. My italics.

¹⁸ Bérulle, *Discours* 296.

this pictorial paradigm is two-sided, one negative and always doomed to fail which is properly painting, and the other positive and always successful, which is printing and imprinting. The lexical network of painting is associated with the impossible image and portrait, while the printing lexical network expresses what God, Christ or the Holy Spirit can achieve, compared to the helplessness of all creatures. Thus, for example, 'the Holy Spirit prints [or imprints] its divine fecundity in the happy womb of the Holy Virgin';¹⁹ or Jesus, who can yet paint himself, prints/imprints his figure and perfect resemblance in the soul;²⁰ the soul itself, supported by grace, can imprint the spirit and the virtue of Jesus in its ground.²¹ Finally, the Incarnation, as explained by Bérulle in terms of the metaphor of the sun—again in an original way which we can now see—is much more a matter of printing and imprinting than painting. Strangely enough, one can find the same kind of distinction between painting and printing formulated by Jean-Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley, and, although a disciple of Francis de Sales, a ferocious opponent of mystical writings, in particular in his *Théologie mystique* of 1640. Mocking the weakness of images used by mystical writers who attempt to describe an ineffable experience, he ridicules the Jesuits Maximilian Vander Sandt and Jacques Alvarez. He then draws a general conclusion:

Tout cela est beau, mais quel rapport peut-il avoir avec ce que Dieu opère dans une âme, où il se plaît de poser le cachet sacré de ses divines impressions ? Qui n'aura compassion des débiles efforts de ces écrivains, qui avec la pointe d'une plume, nous veulent dépeindre sur du papier ce que ceux-là mêmes qui le tracent disent être inconcevable, ineffable, inexprimable, qui reconnaissent ingénuement qu'ils ne font que bégayer, et qu'ils ne forment que des crayons imparfaits, de ces Passivités Mystiques.²²

Camus contrasts the 'sacred seal of his divine impressions' affixed in the soul by God and the weak depiction that some writers struggle to trace on paper with the tip of a quill—a tip that cannot cut into the surface of the paper and thus cannot reach to the heart and soul of the reader. It is striking that Camus exerts his criticism on the (weak and impotent) style of these writers, taking on the same metaphors applied by Bérulle to render the weakness and impotency

19 '[le Saint Esprit] imprime sa fécondité divine dans les heureuses entrailles de la Très Sainte Vierge.' (p. 167).

20 Bérulle, *Discours* 295.

21 Bérulle, *Discours* 296.

22 Camus Jean-Pierre, *La Théologie mystique (1640)* [Paris: G. Alliot, 1640] (Grenoble: 2003) 103–104.

of painting (in the soul) compared to the efficacy of printing. In other words, from Camus to Bérulle, the metaphors of 'painting' and 'printing' have become superfluous and artificial ornaments void of any representative ability, while they obviously deeply nourished Bérulle's representation of the Incarnation.²³

Printing and imprinting mark the flesh, leave a trace and induce the incarnation, while painting stays on the surface and can therefore be erased. This is exactly what happens when the Sun itself comes down to earth in order to be united with the mirror in which it until then had only been reflected. This is the account that Bérulle gives of the Incarnation:

Mais pour nous conduire en l'intelligence de nos mystères, par la même comparaison du Soleil qui imprime son image dans le miroir qui lui est exposé, supposons ce qui n'est pas au soleil de la terre pour mieux entendre ce qui est au soleil du ciel empyrée et, regardant cette image vive et éclatante du soleil dans ce miroir, disons en nous-même : que serait-ce si ce soleil, qui imprime son image et sa figure dans cette glace, descendait du ciel pour *s'appliquer, s'imprimer et s'incorporer* lui-même en cette glace et ne faire avec elle qu'un même corps et substance de lumière et de clarté ? Combien cela serait-il *différent de l'image morte du peintre en un tableau, et de la ressemblance encore imprimée dans la glace par les rayons du soleil* ? Car lors ce n'est qu'une espèce du soleil imprimée par son aspect dans cette glace ; mais ici, ce serait le soleil même en sa propre substance et lumière, qui aurait *pénétré, non de ses rayons mais de sa substance*, cette glace, et ne ferait avec elle qu'un même corps et principe de lumière. Or c'est ce que le Verbe éternel, vrai Soleil en l'éternité, et le Soleil Orient en la Divinité, fait en l'humanité sacrée de Jésus.²⁴

Bérulle draws an extended contrast between the vivid and bright, incorporated, animated image of the Word and the dead image of the painter. The physical quality of the metaphors reaches some kind of apex with several strong terms ('to apply', 'to imprint', 'to incorporate', 'to penetrate') and thus some kind of realization which takes place as much in the text as in the Incarnation process, from which (both text and process) all traces of painting have disappeared. What is left is a radical transformation that goes beyond the surface of the reflected image, a transmutation of the flesh of the image into the flesh of Christ. Bérulle allows one to speak in terms of transmutation; in another pas-

23 See Belin, *Op. cit.*, and Ferrari, *Op. cit.* 157.

24 Ibid.

sage in Discourse 5 he describes a transitive chain of gazes which runs from God the Father to man through the Son, gazes that convey such a powerful love that it transmutes not just man, but his being, 'l'être de l'homme', much in the same way as the incarnated mirror was transformed.²⁵ In the end, the substance of this paradoxical art of painting is not imagination but love. One then understands that the art of painting is doomed to failure and erasure because it originates in imagination while the art of printing is the powerful vehicle of Love, as Bérulle suggests: 'Et c'est imagination de vouloir loger Dieu en des espaces imaginaires, sa grandeur mérite un meilleur séjour et rien n'est digne de lui que lui-même, et il est lui-même à soi-même son lieu.'²⁶

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²⁵ Bérulle, *Discours* 215–216.

²⁶ Bérulle, *Discours* 233.

Discerning Vision: Cognitive Strategies in Cornelis Everaert's *Mary Compared to the Light* (ca. 1511)

Bart Ramakers

Play and Characters

Among the extensive dramatic oeuvre of the Flemish playwright Cornelis Everaert—principal poet of the chamber of rhetoric called The Holy Ghost of Bruges, fuller and dyer, clerk of the local drapers' guild—are four so-called 'comparations' ('comparaties').¹ These are dramatized comparisons between on the one hand an object of devotion, and on the other a Biblical object or city, an object from daily life, a natural phenomenon, or living creature.² Thus, Everaert compares the apostle Peter to a dove and Mary to the throne of Solomon, the city of Jerusalem, a merchant ship, and light, respectively. Comparisons basically follow the structure of the *spel van zinne*, the Dutch equivalent of the morality play,³ in the sense that a character who represents mankind goes in search of the answer to a particular question, *in casu* how Mary (or Peter) can

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- 1 For editions of and introductions to these plays, see Hüsken W.N.M. (ed.), *De Spelen van Cornelis Everaert*, 2 vols. (Hilversum: 2005). The form and content of the comparisons have been the subject of studies by Ramakers B., *Spelen en figuren. Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd* (Amsterdam: 1996) 387–389, and Moser N., "Maria verklaard. Everaert als exegeet in *Maria ghecompareirt byde claeerheit* (1511)", in Dijk H. van – Ramakers R. et al., *Spel en spektakel. Middeleeuws toneel in de Lage Landen, Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen* 23 (Amsterdam: 2001) 246–262, 369–377; and Moser N., *De strijd voor rhetorica. Poëtica en positie van rederijders in Vlaanderen, Brabant, Zeeland en Holland tussen ca. 1450 en ca. 1620* (Amsterdam: 2001) 135, 141–146, 155–157.
 - 2 In another genre practiced by Everaert, the so-called table play, objects are allegorized and subsequently presented to the person in whose honor the play is being performed. See: Ramakers B., "Book, Beads and Bitterness: Making Sense of Gifts in Two Table Plays by Cornelis Everaert", in Corbellini S. – Hoogvliet M. – Ramakers B. (eds.), *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, *Intersections: Studies in Early Modern Culture* 38 (Leiden – Boston: 2015), 141–170.
 - 3 On this genre, see Ramakers B., "Dutch Allegorical Drama: Tradition and Conceptual Approach", in Strietman E. – Happé P. (eds.), *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400–1625*, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 12 (Turnhout: 2006) 127–147.

be compared in all their spiritual properties to the aforementioned objects in all their material characteristics. The plays were performed in the early decades of the sixteenth century during theatrical competitions linked to a series of processions—mainly in honor of the Blessed Virgin—held in the Flemish coastal towns of Nieuwpoort and Veurne.

As theatre, these plays combine word and image. The latter not only manifests itself in personifications, particularly in their costumes and attributes, in their mimicry and gestures, as well as in their overall action on stage, but also in the use of living images or *tableaux vivants*, which served argumentative, devotional and mnemonic purposes. In four of the five specimens the interplay of word and image amounts mainly to catechetical instruction: the characteristics and qualities of the *comparandum* are explained and illustrated through comparison. The sensory perception of the plays' action, its external aspect, primarily leads to rational insight, as shown from the reactions of the human characters in them. However, in one of them, *Mary Compared to the Light* (*Maria Ghecompareirt by de Claerheyd*), the mankind character does not perceive the comparison outwardly, at least as far as the visual action is concerned, but inwardly, as the mankind character in this play is blind. His name is Imaginative Mind (*Ymagineirlic Gheest*). He enters the stage from the audience, desiring to experience how Mary can be compared to light. He is the exemplary spectator, representing all those watching and listening to the play. It was written for a dramatic contest held in 1511 or 1512 in Nieuwpoort, probably on occasion of the town's annual Corpus Christi procession.⁴

Although for reasons of simplicity I use the word 'light', the Middle Dutch term used by Everaert (almost) throughout his play is 'clærheyd' ('clarity'). In all likelihood the organizers consciously used the word 'clærheyd' in their invitation to the contest, in order to refer to what light achieves in its modern-day meaning of a beam of electromagnetic radiation, namely clearness, brightness, splendor, or indeed, clarity, but also effects such as color, reflection, heat and warmth.⁵ In fact, medieval light terminology was highly differentiated.⁶

4 Hüskens, *De Spelen* 11 751; and Van Bruaene A.-L., *Om beters wille. Rederijerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1400–1650* (Amsterdam: 2008) 209, esp. n. 85.

5 In those passages where the Latin Vulgate and vernacular Dutch Bible translations use the word 'claritas' and 'clærheyd' respectively, it always refers to the radiant effect of light or to radiance in a spiritual sense (*Wisdom* 7:25; *Luke* 2:9; 1 *Corinthians* 15:41; 2 *Corinthians* 4:6; *Acts* 22:11).

6 Hedwig K., *Sphaera Lucis. Studien Zur Intelligibilität des Seienden im Kontext der mittelalterlichen Lichtspekulation*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Neue Folge 18 (Münster: 1980) 13.

Imaginative Mind is advised by three characters, personifications like him, who each fulfil a clearly demarcated role in accordance with the kind of argument or reasoning they represent. The first is called Experiential Proof (*Experientich Bethooch*), who, according to a stage direction, is 'dressed like an honourable man'.⁷ That Everaert—and the organizers of the Nieuwpoort contest—aimed for a truly scientific analogy, is made clear by Experiential Proof not only through his name, but also through his sustained analysis of light on the basis of scientific observation, that is, on the basis of knowledge received through the senses. Although he occasionally appeals to *auctoritates*,⁸ he persistently describes the effects of light in empirical terms, even explicitly, by introducing them with expressions such as 'as we may see [learn] through experience'.⁹ We should keep in mind that the kind of empiricism practiced in the Middle Ages was not exclusively based on personal experimental observation, but could include empirical data from the past, either collected by the author himself or by others, passed down through manuscript and print, and thought experiments.¹⁰ In fact, education in natural philosophy was dominated by reading and textual commentary.¹¹ The period nevertheless witnessed an increasing engagement with the sensory details of natural phenomena.¹²

Opposite Experiential Proof's physical analysis of the *comparans* light, the second advisor, Sweet Eloquence (*Soetzinneghe Eloquencie*), supplies the theological analysis of the *comparandum* Mary. As the personification of the art of rhetoric or poetry, she—this character is called a 'woman' ('vrau')¹³—is able not only to fathom the analogy between Mary and light, but also to phrase this analogy in a rhetorically convincing way, whereby the persuasiveness depends not only on the origin and quality of the arguments as such—most are taken from Scripture and authorities—but also on the quality of their poetic

7 Above vs. 1: 'gheabytuweirt als een man edelic'. Citations from the play are taken from the edition by Hüsken (Hüsken, *De Spelen* 11, 747–784). In some instances my punctuation and interpretation differs from that of the editor.

8 Vss. 482, 486, 641.

9 Vs. 665: 'zo men zien mach by exsperientie'. Also see this characters's use of *exsperient* (vs. 301), *exsperientie(n)* (vss. 450, 534), *exsperientelic* (vss. 384, 574) and *exsperientich* (641).

10 Grant E., *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: 1994) 221–224. On *experientia*, see Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs* 201.

11 Park K., "Observation in the Margins, 500–1500", in Daston L. – Lunbeck E. (eds.), *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago – London: 2011) 15–44, esp. 15–17; and Pomata G., "Observation Rising: Birth of an Epistemic Genre, 1500–1650", in *ibid.*, 45–80, esp. 45–46.

12 Biernoff S., *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: 2002) 64–65; and Park, "Observation in the Margins" 35.

13 Vs. 2.

expression. Sweet Eloquence's name hints at this direction. Her verbal presence goes further than just providing a doctrinal interpretation of the Virgin *per se*. She also aims to venerate her. Sweet Eloquence covers her arguments in laudatory expressions that contribute to an atmosphere of worship and devotion. Indeed, from a certain point onwards she no longer speaks about Mary in the third person, but addresses her in the second person, directly, perhaps even literally, in the sense that she turns towards a visual representation of the Blessed Virgin. A painting or statue situated on or near the stage is one possibility. Almost without exception she starts her clauses with two-line apostrophes consisting of the name 'Mary' and the word 'clarity', such as 'Oh Mary, clarity, steeped in virtue, / in pure hearts you abundantly shine'.¹⁴

It is not Sweet Eloquence, however, who starts addressing Mary directly. It is the third participant in the comparison, called Grounded Scripture (*Ghefondeirde Schriftuere*), who does so. She—this is again a female character, 'spiritually dressed' ('gheestelicken ghecleet'), with a burning candle in her hand¹⁵—is not on stage from the beginning, but appears halfway through the prologue, shortly after Experiential Proof and Sweet Eloquence have lifted Imaginative Mind onto the stage from among the audience. The three of them start looking for her, since her presence is indispensable to explaining the previously mentioned analogy. She has to provide the written basis—quotes of the prophets, doctors of the Church and liturgical prayers—for the comparison between Mary and light. She addresses Mary by paraphrasing *Canticles* 4:7: 'You are indeed the light, according to the word / of the Canticle "fair and flawless"'.¹⁶ In fact, Grounded Scripture starts most of her clauses by quoting or paraphrasing a Bible book or an authority, often referring to that book's title or that authority's name, such as 'Saint Bernard, / filled with contemplation, / says'.¹⁷

The action in this comparison is predominantly verbal and static, consisting of a series of discursive exchanges devoted to the various aspects of the comparison, in which the characters take turns according to a regular pattern that will be described in more detail below. The act of comparing is referred to

14 Vss. 541–542: 'O Maria, claeheyte, der duechden bewynsels, / in reyne herten ghy overvloedich rayt'.

15 Vs. 104.

16 Vss. 230–240: 'Ghy zyt wel de claeheyte, naer de verhalichede / van der Cantycke "zuver ende net gheheel"'.
 17 Vss. 495–496: 'Den heleghe Bernaerdus, / vul contemplacien, / seght'.

by the verb ‘comparereren’ or ‘ghelycken’ (‘to compare’) and countless instances of the adverb ‘gelijk’ (‘like’ or ‘just as’).¹⁸

Besides the characters’ appearance and apparel, the visual in this play is represented by two living images or *tableaux vivants*. One of them, situated at the end of the prologue, provides the spectators with an analogue for Mary in the well-established tradition of typology, that of Queen Esther kneeling before Ahasuerus (*Esther* 8:3), which appears in both the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*—the main medieval typological treatises—where it functions as a prefiguration of the death of the Virgin and her coronation in heaven respectively. The redemptive significance of this event—Mary interceding for mankind because of her closeness to the Trinity—is also expressed by the second tableau vivant, which is revealed at the end of the comparison: Mary standing between heaven and earth, as *Mediatrice* between the Trinity, which is enthroned above, and mankind situated below. This tableau was inspired by the woman from the *Book of Revelation* (12:1–6).

Approach and Plan

The condition that makes it impossible for Imaginative Mind to see either *comparans* or *comparandum* but allows him to imagine their characteristics and qualities, illustrates that seeing and understanding in this play are not so much a matter of corporeal sight, but also—or even primarily—a matter of spiritual sight, a function of the internal senses, among which imagination took pride of place.¹⁹ As we shall see, this kind of seeing was supposed to lead man from earthly wisdom, or *scientia*, to divine wisdom, or *sapientia*. Being blind, Imaginative Mind is simply forced to employ the kind of vision the rest of the audience can use voluntarily.

I am not primarily concerned here with imagination in its present-day meaning of the power of literary, figurative or mimetic invention, but rather, with the creative or artistic aspect of image-making that in medieval times was closely related to the cognitive one.²⁰ Poets as well as painters created verbal

18 Vss. 2, 10, 42, 55a (‘comparereren’); vss. 70, 124, 446, 689 (‘ghelycken’). Also see the nouns ‘comparacie’ (vs. 207) and ‘ghelyckenesse’ (vs. 646).

19 Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment* 81–144; Woolgar C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven – London: 2006) 20–21; Rothstein B.T., *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge: 2006) 36–37; Schumacher L., *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Chichester: 2011) 91; and Williamson B., “Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion”, *Speculum* 88 (2013) 1–43, esp. 3–4.

20 Brann E.T.H., *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Lanham, MD: 1991) 45, 59.

and visual images that were thought to be the outcome of the application—consciously or unconsciously—of imagination in its meaning of the internal sense or faculty of knowing. In the creative process, mental images thus led to artistic images through reproductive imagination.²¹ In fact, aesthetic theorists generally point out that art—or the beauty of art for that matter—depends on drawing analogies.²² After all, we can only apprehend an object through metaphor. Describing it in terms of all its properties would be an endless task.²³ The creation of literature or art can be defined as ‘a kind of comparative brooding over mental images’.²⁴ Imagination, together with contemplation and meditation, played a significant role in medieval aesthetics.²⁵

As I hope to make clear, *Mary Compared to the Light* exemplifies the working of imagination, not only by featuring a personification of it, but also by showing how this faculty was used to produce, analyze and understand light as a natural analogy of—or metaphor for—Mary and her supernatural significance. At the end it even confronts the audience with a living image or *tableau vivant* that can be seen as a creative, artistic product of imagination, elevating Imaginative Mind’s understanding of Mary to the level of spiritual vision, and thus completing the aforementioned trajectory from *scientia* to *sapientia*. Everaert’s play, then, is epistemological, demonstrating to its audience how thinking evolves, and how knowledge about the spiritual realm can be extracted from the material world. The use of imagination went even further than establishing parallels or connections between the visible and the invisible. It also was an instrument with which to explore and understand—or, better, experience—the object of veneration, Mary, in a spiritual, meditative manner. It is the living image at the end—and the characters’ response towards it—that forms the clearest indication of the play’s intentions in this respect. Whereas throughout the play the characters engage in a kind of verbal painting, creating mental images by virtual means, in this material image of the Virgin, bearer of God incarnate, the Word in a sense has become flesh. Everaert presents this image as the product of contemplation by the play’s main character, as a mystical vision, through which he may ascend to the Trinity. Therefore, I shall expand on the relation between imagination and cognition, as well as meditation.

21 Ibid. 53; and Woolgar, *The Senses* 187.

22 Jaroszyński P., *Beauty and Being: Thomistic Perspectives* (Toronto: 2011) 214.

23 Ibid.

24 Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 59.

25 Grant E., *The Nature of Natural Philosophy in the Late Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: 2010) 195–196, 201–202, 209.

The mixture of intellectual and spiritual discourse the play offers was characteristic of medieval mysticism. Unlike approaches that suggest an opposition between knowledge and wisdom, defining the first as entirely speculative (based on the mind or reason) and the second as exclusively affective (based on love and good will), placing experience wholly in the realm of the latter,²⁶ I would like to argue that natural theology promoted a kind of knowledge equally informed by experience, but primarily of the visible world, which through analogical reasoning was connected—or lifted up—to the invisible realm. Experience on this second, elevated, level may be called sapiential, but it by no means depended on worship, piety and the application of the virtues of faith, hope and charity alone. Cognizing God or any other spiritual entity could involve and combine sapiential as well as natural philosophical knowledge.

Everaert's aspirations in this regard—stimulated by a genre requiring him to establish analogies between a devotional entity and a natural phenomenon—become evident from references ranging from Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* (*Sentences*), a classic theological handbook widely known through manuscripts and commentaries, and consulted for disputations and sermons,²⁷ to Bernard of Clairvaux's *Homiliae super evangelio Missus est angelus Gabriel* (*Homilies on the Words of the Gospel 'The angel Gabriel was sent'*), a popular source of Marian theology highlighting her spiritual significance in the glowing terms that brought Bernard not only the nickname of 'mellifluus [honey-sweet voiced] doctor', but also that of 'doctor marialis'.²⁸

Everaert testifies to the bottom-up religious interests of late medieval laymen, who paired scientific curiosity with heartfelt devotion, by shifting the object of mystical devotion from God (or Christ) to Mary, the ultimate mediator between heaven and earth; they fostered a distinctive sort of Marian mysticism, utilizing an analogical approach in their efforts to understand her, drawing on and referring to authorities in the realm of both *scientia* and *sapientia*. Vernacular drama was one means whereby they strove to secure what

26 Simpson J., "From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*", *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986) 1–23, esp. 4–6.

27 Ocker Ch., "Scholastic Interpretation of the Bible", in Hauser A.J. – Watson D.F. (eds.) – Kaufman S. (ass. ed.), *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 2: The Medieval through the Reformation Periods* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: 2009) 254–279, esp. 255–256; and Van Nieuwenhove R., *An introduction to medieval theology* (Cambridge: 2012) 147–148.

28 Bell T., *Bernardus dixit. Bernardus van Clairvaux in Martin Luthers werken* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1989) 296; and Reynolds B.K., *Gateway to Heaven. Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods, Vol. 1: Doctrine and Devotion* (Hyde Park, NY: 2012) 215.

Bernd Hamm succinctly calls immediate or near grace ('nahe Gnade').²⁹ There was a strong need for devotional images to access that grace. This phenomenon partly resulted from what Hamm aptly describes as the dissolution of boundaries ('Entgrenzung') between clerics and laymen.³⁰ In the case of the theatre of the rhetoricians, however, this 'democratization' of mystical experience did not lead to simplification and vulgarization. On the contrary, Everaert's play pairs mysticism and intellectualism. And for good reasons, since, as shall be demonstrated below, the mystical process started in the mind or *spiritus*. Symptomatic of the mystical character of this literature is the fact that references to the Passion and Mary's role as compassionate mother who stood vigil beneath the cross are virtually absent. She is presented not so much as co-sufferer with Christ her son, but as co-redeemer, her heavenly, spiritual significance stressed above her earthly or bodily experience. The inspiration and motivation for imagining her like this lie precisely in the aim of comparing her to light. As we shall see, medieval light metaphysics was firmly grounded in exegetical commentary on the story of creation in *Genesis*. This tradition offered several opportunities for linking Mary to light's supernatural, cosmological significance as a communicative force between heaven and earth.

I do not wish to claim that Everaert or his fellow rhetoricians had first-hand knowledge of the work or ideas of the authors mentioned and quoted below. Even in those cases where he connects a particular notion to a particular author, Everaert in all likelihood drew on manuscripts and printed books in which these ideas and references were transmitted secondarily—or they were communicated to him by a knowledgeable townsman, maybe a cleric. But in any case it was Everaert who creatively transformed these ideas into a play that demonstrated, within the competitive circumstances of its performance, the high level of intellectual and artistic prowess he and his fellow rhetoricians were capable of achieving. If the jury assessed his plays on the basis of the knowledge and theatrical ingenuity they evinced, Everaert must have met these high standards, since for one comparison he won second prize, for another third prize. But he never came first, and *Mary Compared to the Light* did not even win a prize. Apparently there were colleagues who wrote even more intellectual, more dramatically sophisticated plays.

29 Hamm B., *Religiosität im späten Mittelalter. Spannungspole, Neuaufbrüche, Normierungen*, ed. R. Friedrich – W. Simon (Tübingen: 2011) 514, 524, 551.

30 Ibid. 440, 551.

Learning by Comparison

The word 'comparatie' is obviously derived from the Latin *comparatio*, which, together with the use of *auctoritates* and *exempla*, was one of the techniques for setting up the extended argument of a sermon, the so-called *dilatatio*, with which preachers started after the central theme had been formulated and divisions and subdivisions had been ordered.³¹ Besides a clear definition of the *thema*, sermon-making included the *divisio*, the arrangement and consequent discussion of its different aspects or parts. Other principles of composition, easily recognizable in the setup of Everaert's comparisons, are the *distinctio*, 'which is the movement from the general to the particular meanings of a term', and the *pluralitatis acceptio*, 'which means taking into consideration the different aspects of one element which the distinction or the division had highlighted'.³² Just as evident is the use of *similes*, by means of which a particular religious concept or object of devotion, such as Mary, could be categorized both in its whole and in its parts.³³ Medieval collections of *distinctiones* contained a large number of such *similes*, mostly taken from the animal world and from the properties of things, complemented by *exempla* and Biblical quotations, something which perfectly fits Everaert's approach. Knowledge of the properties of things was considered to enter memory and understanding more easily than logical reasoning and argumentation.³⁴

Everaert's comparisons also show the influence of sermon-making through the application of so-called natural, figural and scriptural argumentation by means of personifications that embody these different lines of reasoning.³⁵ Whereas natural arguments are derived from nature, that is, from natural philosophy, scriptural arguments are obviously from the Bible or from the writings of theological authorities. Figural arguments may either refer to *exempla* (and literature in general) or to Old Testament references and prefigurations, both in word and image (the latter in the form of *tableaux vivants*). Scriptural arguments (and images) are sometimes limited to the New Testament, creating a

31 Moser has pointed out the similarities between sermons and Everaert's comparisons, particularly in *Mary Compared to the Light*. See: Moser, "Maria verklaard" 247–248; and idem, *De strijd voor rhetorica* 140–142.

32 Serventi S., "Did Giordano da Pisa use the *Distinctiones* of Nicolas Gorran?", in Andersson R. (ed.), *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, *Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation Sermons and Preaching* 6 (Turnhout: 2007) 83–116, esp. 83.

33 Ibid. 84.

34 Ibid. 84–85.

35 Moser, "Maria verklaard" 249–251; and Moser, *De strijd voor rhetorica* 132–140, 143–146, esp. 135.

clear opposition between salvation history *sub lege* and *sub gratia*. The application of this threefold approach was, in most instances, explicitly required in the invitations that chambers of rhetoric sent to each other, phrasing the topic of their competitions and stipulating the way it should be dealt with discursively. This must have been the case with the invitations to the competitions for which Everaert wrote his comparisons, too, although none has survived.

Generally, Everaert handles every comparison the same way. Two or three discussion partners appear in addition to a mankind character. There is always a personification of Scripture, who most frequently cites the Bible and other authorities, although he or she will not be the only one to do so.³⁶ Furthermore, a personification of the comparison itself, of making a typological or moral connection between *comparans* and *comparandum*, is included among the regular characters. In *Mary Compared to a Ship*, the roles are strictly differentiated. First, Clever Pointing (*Behendich Voorstel*), dressed as a seaman, points out various parts of the vessel, which are then linked to qualities of the Blessed Virgin by Moral Proof (*Morael Besouck*), dressed as a secular priest, while Scriptural Proof (*Scriptuerlicke Beledinghe*), wearing a nun's dress, provides Biblical evidence for each of these connections. Thus, the whole ship, from top to bottom, from back to front, is analyzed in detail—and so, of course, is Mary. Also standard are personifications of the art of rhetoric itself. They can simply be called Rhetoric (*Rhetorycka*) or may have more sophisticated names such as Rhetorical Pleasure (*Rhethoryckelicke Verjolysinghe*) or, as in *Mary Compared to the Light*, Sweet Eloquence. This personification calls attention to the capacities of the art of rhetoric: describing and lauding the object of veneration in an enjoyable, pleasing and also affective, moving way. That, after all, was what rhetoric or rhetorical poetry was supposed to achieve.³⁷

Analogy and Cognition

Setting up analogies, establishing relations or similitudes between material and spiritual objects, was not just an intellectual exercise or game, nor was it just a handy didactic tool for catechetical instruction. However

36 Drewes has pointed to the importance of personifications of Scripture in Everaert's plays. See: Drewes J.B., "Het interpreteren van godsdienstige spelen van zinne", *Jaarboek "De Fontaine"* 29 (1978–1979) 5–124, esp. 68.

37 That Everaert thought of rhetoric as an art with classical roots is demonstrated by the fact that he describes its personifications on stage as female characters wearing antique clothing, 'à l'antique' ('up zyn antycqe'; above vs. 2).

entertaining, playful and rhetorically convincing such analogies were deemed to be—a reason certainly for choosing the comparison as a genre for dramatic competition—they essentially were a method of cognition within the preeminent branch of contemporary knowledge, which is to say, theology, and thus formed a serious intellectual endeavour.³⁸ The basis of analogical reasoning was *Romans* 1:20, a passage from Scripture often commented upon: ‘Ever since the creation of the world His [God’s] invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’.³⁹ Another Pauline dictum expressing this idea was 1 *Corinthians* 13:12: ‘But now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face’.⁴⁰ Augustine referred to it repeatedly in *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*).⁴¹ Cognizing God literally became a form of speculation (*speculatio*), of mirroring.⁴² Everaert’s plays, and those of the rhetoricians with whom he competed, are part of a tradition of natural theology, specifically of the attempt to infer the nature of God (or of any other godly or saintly being, such as the Blessed Virgin) from what could be known about the created world.⁴³ The rhetoricians clearly took part in this scholarly endeavour, which is suggested by the use in their texts of such terms as ‘experience’ (*experientie*) and of declinations of ‘to speculate’ (*speculeren*).⁴⁴ According to Richard of Saint-Victor, not only words but also things were representational and could therefore be analyzed for their spiritual meaning.⁴⁵ Bartholomew the Englishman held the view that man ascended to things

38 Pasnau R., *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 1997) 8.

39 Minnis A., “Langland’s Ymaginatif and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination”, *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981) 71–103, esp. 88; Pasnau, *Theories of cognition* 9; Cary P., *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: 2000) 65; Newman B., “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture”, *Speculum* 80 (2005) 1–43, esp. 15; MacCormack S., “Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity”, in Vessey M. (ed.) – Reid S. (assist. ed.), *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester: 2012) 398–415, esp. 405; and Hamburger J.F., “Mysticism and Visuality”, in Hollywood – Beckman 2012, *Christian Mysticism* 277–293, esp. 288.

40 Newman, “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I saw’?” 15; Karnes M., *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago – London: 2011) 18; and MacCormack, “Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity” 405.

41 Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.1.1; 6.10.12; extensive references to the mirror-image in 10.3.5; also see MacCormack, “Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity” 405.

42 Hamburger, “Mysticism and Visuality” 288; Milner M., *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham, Surrey – Burlington, VT: 2011) 73; and Falkenburg R., *The Land of Unlikeness: Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Zwolle: 2011) 117.

43 Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 9.

44 Pleij H., “De laatmiddeleeuwse rederijkersliteratuur als vroeg-humanistische overtuigingskunst”, *Jaarboek “De Fonteyne”* 34 (1984) 65–96, esp. 76.

45 Ocker, “Scholastic Interpretation of the Bible” 263–264.

unseen with the help of things seen.⁴⁶ Part of that visual world was man himself, who was created in God's image (*Genesis* 1:27; 9:6).⁴⁷ Knowledge about incorporeal realities could be abstracted by comparing (or contrasting) them with corporeal and therefore sensible objects.⁴⁸ Man could learn about God by applying his mental capacities to the natural world around him, and also by reflecting on the workings of the mind itself or of the soul as the mind's seat. It was the place where man could turn from the sensible to the intelligible, from transient to unchanging forms, to use Plato's terms.⁴⁹ There he could find or, better, know God.⁵⁰ He had to turn inward, in order to look upward.⁵¹

The experiential approach was systematized and most eloquently described by Richard of Saint-Victor in his *Benjamin Minor*, also called *The Book of the Twelve Patriarchs*, where he propagated attentive reading in the book of nature as well as in that of Scripture.⁵² Both provided images, likenesses or analogies, from which the intellect could deduce knowledge about divine things.⁵³ Indeed, Scripture provided the ultimate example of, and authorization for, the use of image and imagination in cognizing the sacred and divine. According to Richard, the Bible described unseen things through the forms of visible things, thus stimulating comparison.⁵⁴ It impressed the invisible on the memory

46 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 88; and idem, "Medieval Imagination and Memory", in Minnis A. – Johnson I. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. 2: The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 2005) 237–274, esp. 258.

47 Augustine, *De Trinitate* 9.12.17; also see MacCormack, "Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity" 408.

48 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 81.

49 Cary, *Augustine's Invention* 12.

50 Ibid. 54.

51 Ibid. 39, 65.

52 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 88; and Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I saw'?" 15–16.

53 Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 256.

54 In this respect Richard drew on Pseudo-Dionysius, who in *De coelesti hierarchia* linked Scripture to nature by declaring that the former provided similitudes for the latter, *in casu* for the order of the heavens. See: Ringbom S., "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 73 (1969) 159–170, esp. 162; and Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 257. Although Pseudo-Dionysius preferred dissimilar to similar likenesses (the former being seemingly contradictory comparisons that unsettled their readers), analogical thinking was dominated by the latter—for example, the analogy of God to light or life, on which, see Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 258. The creation of likenesses fits into the *via positiva* or positive theology: the use of affirmation in thinking about God, on the basis of either speculation or revelation, in the Bible or in nature. See: Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 89, 92; Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 59; and Louth A., "Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology", in Hollywood – Beckman, *Christian Mysticism* 137–146, esp. 137.

'by the beauty of desirable forms'—a clear reference to the aesthetic meaning of such images and their potential inspiration for artists.⁵⁵ Extended metaphors, clearly the product of imagination, were employed to speculate about—or cognize—spiritual beings or entities, especially in *Revelation*, as Richard points out. Given Richard's and other authors' appreciation of the literary or, better, imaginative qualities of the Bible, it should come as no surprise that poets and painters not only copied biblical imagery but also felt licensed to employ the mental procedures that had brought about that imagery.⁵⁶ The same idea, that visible things—both in history, that is, Scripture, and the book of nature—led man to invisible things—*per visibilia ad invisibilia*—inspired Hugh of Saint-Victor to produce a detailed account of perception in another treatise, *De Operibus trium dierum* (*On the Works of Three Days*), also called *Tractatus super invisibilia* (*Treatise on Invisible Things*).⁵⁷ The visible world, more than just the first stage in the mind's ascent to God—one that might as well be skipped by the experienced meditator—became an indispensable, all-consuming phase in this process of elevation.⁵⁸ Moreover, Hugh stressed the beauty of creation and of its creator, turning the study of the visible world into an aesthetic experience. When even mystics had recourse to sense perception, what attraction, we might ask, must it have held for devotionally and intellectually engaged laymen? The visible world lay at their disposal, to be explored through corporeal functions that were like a universal currency.

Vision and Light

Since man could ascend from things seen to things unseen, vision and light, sight's physical prerequisite, were imbued with great importance. Of the external or bodily senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch—sight took pride of place, especially in relation to intellection.⁵⁹ Medieval light imagery

55 *Benjamin Minor*, cap. 15; translation cited in Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 89.

56 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 94.

57 Hamburger, "Mysticism and Visuality" 288.

58 Ibid.; and Poirel D., "The Spirituality and Theology of Beauty in Hugh of St. Victor", in Matter E.A. – Smith L. (eds.), *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Grover A. Zinn, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: 2013) 247–280, esp. 249.

59 Woolgar, *The Senses* 147–148; Vance E., "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye", in Nichols S.G. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage/Fascinations/Frames* (Baltimore: 2008) 13–29, esp. 17; and Milner, *The Senses* 27–28.

originated in Plato's *Republic*, which posits that knowledge of eternal verities is acquired by a process analogous to vision of the imperfect material world.⁶⁰ It was Augustine who discussed cognition as a way of seeing with eyes that could be impaired—blinded, so to say—by sin or any other defect, and who construed intellectual disability as a disease of the mind's eye that could be cured by education.⁶¹ Augustine used light analogies to explain the relationship between seeing and understanding, between the outer and the inner eye, between physical and intellectual sight.⁶² Another Church Father, Gregory the Great, spoke of the eyes of the heart or mind—*cordis* or *mentis oculis*—as the seat of knowledge about God.⁶³ Cognition and understanding, closely linked to the metaphor of eyes that see, also became associated with the action and character of light. Visually impairment was construed as the inability to preceive of light. Likewise, the lack of knowlege was identified with the lack of enlightenment. In the context of medieval views of intellection, the importance of light can hardly be overestimated, because it linked man's intellectual prowess to his divine essence. Commenting on 1 *Corinthians* 13:12, Augustine described the human mind as an image or reflection of God's nature.⁶⁴ Mankind, in its effort to know, was closely likened to God.⁶⁵ In comparable words, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (*Summary of Theology*) explained that 'the intellectual light in us is nothing other than a particular shared likeness of the uncreated light',⁶⁶ that is, of God. Robert Grosseteste, a medieval champion of optics, called illumination the force by which God filled the emptiness of the rational part of the mind.⁶⁷

60 Lindberg D.C., *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago – London: 1976) 95; and Tachau K.H., *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250–1345* (Leiden: 1988) 6–8.

61 Cary, *Augustine's Invention* 41, 74–75.

62 Gilson S.A., *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante*, Studies in Italian Literature 8 (Lewiston etc.: 2000) 224–225.

63 Fraeters V., "Visio/Vision", in Hollywood – Beckman, *Christian Mysticism 178–188*, esp. 179; and Williamson, "Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion" 12–13.

64 Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.23.44; also see Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 18; and Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 34.

65 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 13.

66 Aquinas Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 85, Art. 5; translation cited in Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 9.

67 Grosseteste Robert, *On the Six Days of Creation: A Translation of the Hexaëmeron*, ed. C.F.J. Martin (Oxford: 1996) 78, 80.

The idea of the visible world being a mirror of the invisible world stimulated speculation in the sense of intellectual reflection on light too, it being the most visible of all natural phenomena and the force that made things visible in the first place.⁶⁸ Its reflective potential, the possibilities it offered for drawing analogies between things material and spiritual, was used to help understand and express the meaning of the highest of elements in this realm: God, the Trinity, heaven and its inhabitants, man in his spiritual and intellectual dimensions. The link between light and intellection led to representations of theology as a queen sparkling and shining in the light of divine wisdom.⁶⁹ Its sister discipline of philosophy was called the *lignum scientiae boni et mali* ('the light of knowledge about right and wrong'), subject to the light of revelation.⁷⁰ Theologians were stimulated to construct analogies between natural light and divine light.⁷¹

In *De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (*On the Morals of the Catholic Church*), Augustine described man's knowledge of God as 'being inwardly illuminated' by Him, since 'He is light itself' and 'it is given to us to be illuminated by that light'.⁷² And so, he continues, 'when the soul tries to fix its gaze upon that light, it quivers in its weakness and is not quite able to do so. Yet it is from this light that the soul understands whatever it is able to understand'.⁷³ Consequently, Augustine considered light to be the essence of Christ as well.⁷⁴ His words are taken from *De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*), wherein he discusses the creation of light and the light of creation. (As we shall see, in his play Everaert too refers to this primordial light.) In Augustine's case, as in many others, the main source for these light analogies was Scripture. The Bible frequently employs light imagery to express the essence of a number of ideas and feelings: life, salvation, judgment, truth, delight, joy.⁷⁵ A blinding, bright

68 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 62; and Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 177.

69 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 80, 164.

70 Ibid. 165.

71 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 230 and n. 22.

72 Augustine, *De moribus Ecclesiae* 1.11.19; translation cited in Gill M.J., "Augustine's Light", *Allegorica* 23 (2002) 32–54, esp. 37. Also see Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 231–232; Matthews G.B., "Knowledge and illumination", in Stump E. – Kretzmann N. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: 2001) 171–185, esp. 179–181, 183; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 37, 73–74.

73 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.31.50; translation cited in Matthews, "Knowledge and illumination" 180.

74 Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* 4.28; also see Böhme G. – Böhme H., *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Elementen* (Munich: 1996) 156.

75 Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 54, 58.

light was considered a manifestation of the divine.⁷⁶ Christ even calls Himself the light of the world (*John* 8:12).⁷⁷ In fact, the essential role attributed to it in the story of creation stimulated the use of light terminology to express and explain the meaning of all existence, visible and invisible.⁷⁸

Since sensory, corporeal vision involves physical light, illumination as Augustine used it is not to be taken as exclusively metaphorical. The scientific study of the physics of light—optics—was essential to the cognition of God, and played a crucial role in ‘divine science’, to use Thomas Aquinas’s terminology.⁷⁹ Corporeal vision was not only a step in the process leading to spiritual vision; it could easily be conflated with it, the one leading almost imperceptibly to the other, to such an extent that the two become virtually identical.⁸⁰ This was especially true for objects that were thought to be sacred and to have a sacramental effect. Thus, corporeal sight became spirit-aided, illuminated sight. The light that, according to the extra-missive model of corporeal vision, left the eye to encounter its object, could easily be seen as the light that Augustine called God. This dominant optical theory of corporeal vision—which posited that the soul emits rays of light through the eyes, and, that having struck the perceived object, these same rays carry its shape and color back through the eyes to the soul⁸¹—provided a ready analogy for supernatural vision.⁸²

In fact, Augustine devised a scheme consisting of three levels of vision or meditation that help man to complete the trajectory from *scientia* to *sapientia*: he calls the first one corporeal (*corporalis*), the middle one imaginative or spiritual (*spiritualis*), and the third one intellectual (*intellectualis*).⁸³ The

76 Woolgar, *The Senses* 151.

77 Böhme – Böhme, *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft* 149.

78 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 196–197.

79 Aquinas Thomas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences: Questions v and vi of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, ed. and trans. A. Maurer (Toronto: 1963) 8; Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 99; Hahn C., “Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality”, in Nelson R.S. (ed.), *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: 2000) 169–196, esp. 174.

80 Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 95; and Hahn, “Visio Dei” 175.

81 Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 91; Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 206, 223–224; and Woolgar, *The Senses* 21–22, 148.

82 Vance, “Seeing God” 23.

83 *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.24.51, *passim*; and *De Trinitate* 11.1–3. Also see Ringbom, “Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions” 162; Minnis, “Langland’s Ymaginatif” 92–93; Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 53; Hahn, “Visio Dei” 171; Matthews, “Knowledge and illumination” 175–176; Gill, “Augustine’s Light” 35–36; McGinn B., “Visions and Visualizations

middle one clearly involves the use of interior images. That spiritual vision was also called imaginative vision, can be explained by a passage from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*: 'In the present life, enlightenment by the divine ray does not occur without the veil of phantasms, because it is unnatural to man, in his present state of life, to understand without a phantasm'.⁸⁴ The third level of vision provided a platform for the ultimate goal of mystical ascent: the seeing of God, or *visio Dei*, the 'exalting instant of restored *mimesis*—that [connects] the seer to the Seen' in man's soul.⁸⁵ Despite its ideal of imageless devotion, vision and light played a significant role in the mystical movement as well. Descriptions of mystical experiences such as *lumen gloriae* or *visio Dei* already point in this direction.⁸⁶ As corporeal sight supposed that one uses one's eyes and will to see, so, according to the mystic Jan van Ruusbroec, did spiritual sight suppose that one sees the light of grace, approaching it with a clean conscience and good will. Man's will was expected to catch a spark of the divine light and fan it into flame.⁸⁷

Imagination

Thomas's use of the word *phantasma*—image—brings us to a more detailed discussion of the faculty of imagination, one of the so-called internal senses, as opposed to the external or bodily senses, of which, as noted above, sight was deemed the most important.⁸⁸ Having been impressed on the mind, the

in the Here and Hereafter", *Harvard Theological Review* 98 (2005) 227–246, esp. 230; Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 245–256; Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I saw'?" 6–7; Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality* 12; Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 6; and Fraeters, "Visio/Vision" 178.

84 *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, Q. 174, Art. 2. Also see Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions" 162; Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 81 and n. 81; and Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 59. On Thomas's ideas about imagination, see *ibid.* 62–64.

85 Vance, "Seeing God" 25.

86 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 236.

87 *Ibid.* 251–252.

88 Their number, name, location and function varies. See: Steneck N.H., "Albert de Great on the Classification and Localization of the Internal Senses", *Isis* 65 (1974) 193–211, *passim*; Kaulbach E.N., "The 'Vis Imaginativa' and the Reasoning of Ymaginatif in the B-Text of 'Piers Plowman'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 84 (1985) 16–29, esp. 27; and *idem*, "The 'Vis Imaginativa secundum Avicennam' and the Naturally Prophetic Powers of Ymaginatif in the B-Text of 'Piers Plowman'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 86 (1987) 496–514, esp. 502–503.

mental images of an external object, called *species* or *similitudes*,⁸⁹ were then converted by the interior senses into more complex representations, from which, eventually, the intellect distilled universal concepts, thus creating abstract thought.⁹⁰

In Everaert's play, representation of and reference to the phenomenon light involves imagination, which was seen to facilitate the cognitive use of mental images.⁹¹ Essential for understanding the nature of imagination was its position between corporeal sense and abstract reason, where it functioned as the linchpin, so to speak, between perception and understanding.⁹² Out of sensations imagination formed mental pictures, which were handed over to reason and abstracted into ideas, which in turn were stored in memory, together with the sensory and mental images whence they were derived. From there they could be retrieved and once again subjected to the operation of the faculty.⁹³ Of course, like sight, the sense it so strongly depended on, imagination could be criticized for the exaggeration, distortion and delusion it sometimes produced. Even authorities who otherwise underlined its positive potential warned against the vain thoughts it could provoke,⁹⁴ not to speak, of course, of the outright condemnation it later received in Protestant circles during the sixteenth century.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it was generally considered to be a positive, reliable means of knowledge acquisition.⁹⁶

89 Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 58; Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 14; and Hatfield G., "The Cognitive Faculties", in Garber D. – Ayers M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy* (Cambridge: 2003) 951–1002, esp. 957.

90 Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 13, 52, 56; Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 25, 36–38, 43, 50–51, 54–55, 57–58; and Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 93.

91 For the purpose of this article it is unnecessary to distinguish, as some medieval theorists did, between *imaginatio* as the internal sense proper, located in the brain, and *vis* (or *virtus*) *imaginativa* as the reasoning faculty operative within that sense organ or location (Kaulbach, "The 'Vis Imaginativa'" 20–21), nor between *imaginatio* and *phantasia* as different internal senses, as was also done (Steneck, "Albert de Great" 197–198, 201–202; Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 72–73; and Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge" 7).

92 Simpson J., "The Rule of Medieval Imagination", in Dimnick – Simpson – Zeeman, *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm* 4–24, esp. 10; Vance, "Seeing God" 23–24; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 4.

93 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 72, 74.

94 Kaulbach, "The 'Vis Imaginativa'" 17, 25; Woolgar, *The Senses* 16–17; and Vance, "Seeing God" 24–25.

95 Simpson, "The Rule of Medieval Imagination" 11, *passim*.

96 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 7; and Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 59.

As a cognitive tool, imagination (*phantasia* in Greek) was defined by Aristotle in *De anima* (*On the Soul*).⁹⁷ The Latin term *imaginatio* was coined by Augustine in one of his *Epistulae* (*Letters*).⁹⁸ This faculty not only had the ability to create images—*phantasiae*—of things seen, but also of things unseen, by combining elements of objects visually perceived, and it enabled speculation about the course of invisible (spiritual) or future events and the actions and appearances of the beings featured in them.⁹⁹

The mental representations so essential to the cognitive process, were described by Thomas Aquinas as likenesses (*similitudes*).¹⁰⁰ Although he did not conceive of such likenesses as necessarily iconic,¹⁰¹ most medieval authors describing the workings of the mind—on whatever level of sophistication—did so in terms of image and image-making. The greatest of authorities (in Thomas's estimation) had taken this position. In *De anima*, Aristotle stated that '[t]he soul never thinks without an image'.¹⁰² Thomas brought Aristotle's views on cognition into conversation with Augustine's, and tried to reconcile them.¹⁰³ In *De Trinitate* the latter had observed that 'we think in terms of images of what we have experienced'.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere he stressed that the mind always relies on images.¹⁰⁵ Imagination retained the sensible forms received by the five senses and made these forms available to the intellect.¹⁰⁶ In his *Confessiones* (*Confessions*) he argued that man uses his reasoning power to see 'intellectually Your [God's] "invisible things, by means of the things that

97 Aristotle, *De Anima* III.3, 428a1–2, 428a12; III.7, 431b5–6; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 32–33.

98 Augustine, *Epistulae* 7.3.6; Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 241; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 5.

99 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 73, 76; Carruthers M., "Imaginatif, Memoria, and 'The Need for Critical Theory' in *Piers Plowman Studies*", *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 9 (1995) 103–120, esp. 105; Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 128; Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 242; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 6–7.

100 Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 87.

101 Ibid. 108.

102 Aristotle, *De anima* III.7, 431a16–17; Brann, *The World of the Imagination* 44; Kay S., *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia: 2007) 4; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 3, 36.

103 Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition* 10. Also see Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 165–179.

104 Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8.5.7; Carruthers, "Imaginatif, Memoria" 107; and MacCormack, "Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity" 404.

105 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 18.

106 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 93.

are made”’, a reference to *Romans* 1:20, cited above.¹⁰⁷ In other words, image-making was a ‘cognitive necessity’.¹⁰⁸ Human reason simply had to be led by likeness, analogy or comparison of what could be perceived. Hence, too, the use of metaphors, symbols, parables and exempla.¹⁰⁹ Thomas Aquinas expressed the same idea as follows: ‘[S]imple and spiritual impressions easily slip from the mind, unless they be tied as it were to some corporeal image, because human knowledge has a greater hold on sensible objects’.¹¹⁰ It was man’s imagination, his associative faculty, so to speak,¹¹¹ that produced these images.

The role of imagination in natural philosophy should not be underestimated.¹¹² Since knowledge of the visual world played a significant role in theology as well, imagination had an equally important role to play in cognizing divine things. Thomas Aquinas dealt with cognition, as it pertains to theology, in questions five and six of his *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate* (*Exposition on Boethius’s Book On the Trinity*). He too referred to *Romans* 1:20 to argue that theology was about natural, visual things as they refer to first or divine principles.¹¹³ As the divine science was nowhere more appropriately taught than in Scripture, and Scripture described divine things ‘under sensible figures’, one had to rely on images and imagination when practicing theology:¹¹⁴ ‘[A]ll our knowledge begins in the sense’.¹¹⁵

Scientia and Sapientia

As noted above, the careful perception or observation of the natural world could yield insights into the character, workings and meaning of spiritual beings and entities. But mental images or pictures did more: they regulated ethical conduct and stimulated affective piety.¹¹⁶ The link between cognition

107 Augustine, *Confessions* 7.23; Cary, *Augustine’s Invention* 65; Minnis, “Medieval imagination and memory” 240.

108 Carruthers, “Imaginatif, Memoria” 104.

109 Minnis, “Langland’s Ymaginatif” 84; and Simpson, “From Reason to Affective Knowledge” 8.

110 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 11–11, Q. 49, Art. 1; and Minnis, “Langland’s Ymaginatif”, 90, esp. n. 67.

111 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 7.

112 Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* 164–165, 171–172, 192–193.

113 Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* 39, 44, 67.

114 Ibid. 67.

115 Ibid. 68.

116 Minnis, “Medieval Imagination and Memory” 240.

and affection is characteristic of mysticism.¹¹⁷ Indeed, scholars stress the intimate connection between natural philosophy and devotional literature, since both relied on mental images.¹¹⁸ Imagination as analogical reasoning led man to the point where mystical contemplation begins, ideally leading to union with God.¹¹⁹ Thus, the mystical process, even the union itself, involved a kind of knowing on the part of the meditator,¹²⁰ which to a certain extent could be called intellectual or rational, that is, up to the point where, to quote William of Saint-Thierry, 'reason passes into love and is transformed into a certain spiritual and divine understanding which transcends and absorbs all reason'.¹²¹ The idea of reason being consumed by love (or affection) was widespread and also adopted by mystical thinkers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure.¹²² In terms of the Augustinian triad of vision, this meant that man, after passing the first two levels of corporeal and imaginative sight, depended on divine illumination—light in a metaphorical sense—to reach the third level of intellectual sight or understanding,¹²³ that is, illumination as a response to love and good will, leading to the kind of understanding that was called sapiential in the context of mysticism. According to Richard of Saint-Victor, this level of understanding even went beyond the mind: *excessus mentis*.¹²⁴

To arrive at an understanding of God or Christ, man, according to Augustine, depended on the constant presence of divine light.¹²⁵ But however much affective theology may be associated with Augustine,¹²⁶ the role he attributed to imagination implied and stimulated this faculty's application in both rational and affective knowledge, the former leading to the latter.¹²⁷ In fact, he primarily used vision or sight as equivalents for intellection and cognition. As he writes in *De Trinitate*: 'nothing can be loved before first being known'.¹²⁸

117 McGinn B., "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries", *Church History* 56 (1987) 7–24, esp. 21; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 15–16.

118 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 11.

119 Ibid. 5.

120 McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union" 9.

121 Translation cited *ibid.* 10.

122 Ibid., *passim*.

123 Gill, "Augustine's Light" 37, esp. n. 15; Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 69; Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 141–142; and McCormack, "Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity" 406–407.

124 Fraeters, "Visio/Vision" 181.

125 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 71.

126 Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge" 5.

127 McCormack, "Augustine on Scripture and the Trinity" 407.

128 Augustine, *De Trinitate* 10.1.2; and Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 18.

Lovingly imagining God or Christ was essentially the same as cognizing Him.¹²⁹ For Bonaventure, too, meditation was cognitive as well as affective; it meant to love and to know God at the same time.¹³⁰

The use of imagination in devotional life or meditation implied 'an experiential route' to God.¹³¹ It led to what Sixten Ringbom calls 'imaginative devotions' or 'imaginative visions'.¹³² Unlike miraculous visions, that is, apparitions in the strict sense, such 'imaginative visions' were created by the reproductive imagination, either by looking at material images—sculpted, painted, printed—or by reading descriptions of figures or scenes of a devotional kind, or of visions in the strict sense, or by retrieving such images from memory. One might add that in devotional art and literature these mental images materialized in sensually perceivable representations. Despite their aim of imageless devotion, the 'spiritual elite', as Ringbom calls the mystics, could not and did not do without corporeal and spiritual images, thus implementing the Augustinian triad.¹³³ His claim is that during the late Middle Ages the practice of such 'imaginative devotions', stimulated by material imagery, extended beyond the realm of convent and cloister, and became part of lay religious practice as well.¹³⁴ With the help of images and imagination, they too started to aim for the *visio Dei*.

The passing reference above to visions in the strict sense needs to be followed up with an explanation of the distinction drawn between visions that resulted from the meditant's active imagination and visions that were passively received from outside, supernaturally. These visions proper were situated within the realm of dreams. A further distinction was made between the enigmatic dream (*somnium*) and the prophetic vision (*visio*). This sort of mental imagery was highly valued in mystical circles as a means of gaining insight into spiritual matters,¹³⁵ but they were non-experiential, in the sense that they did not have a basis—at least not in theory—in the meditant's visual memory, in images based on sense perception, either external or internal. However, once experienced, such visions could become part of visual memory and of the operations of imagination as well. In fact, being an instrument of the Holy Spirit, Scripture contained many descriptions of persons receiving

129 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 75.

130 Ibid. 112.

131 Cary, *Augustine's Invention* 71.

132 Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions" 162, 166; Harbison C., "Visions and Meditations in Early Flemish Painting", *Simiolus* 15 (1985) 87–118, esp. 102–103, 106–107; and Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality* 39.

133 Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions" 157, 164; Harbison, "Visions and Meditations" 113–114; and Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality* 71–72.

134 Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions" 164–166.

135 Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 244.

such images—*Revelation* was a genuine storehouse of them—which through reading, writing and visual representation became available to large audiences of believers.

I am concerned here neither with discussions about the exact nature of this beatific vision—directly or through theophany—nor with the way late medieval mystics broke loose from the Augustinian triad and mixed its consecutive levels.¹³⁶ What is important in the context of Everaert's play is that medieval mysticism tended towards experience, which depended 'both in reception and expression on the subject's power of imaginative seeing',¹³⁷ on the ability mentally to visualize the object of contemplation, by meditating on verbal and visual imagery of a devotional kind provided by texts and representations in sculpture, painting and print, and, as far as this meditative process was subsequently described or depicted, on the ability to employ such imagery. Scholars define this kind of meditation as 'experiential hermeneutics' or 'imaginative theology'.¹³⁸ Thus, knowing (or seeing) God or any other spiritual being involved the employment of both material and mental images in a systematic, step-by-step process of reasoning.¹³⁹

Discursing Light

In a relatively long prologue (195 lines from a total of 738) the audience of *Mary Compared to the Light* is informed clearly about the perceptual and cognitive issues involved in the upcoming comparison. Experiential Proof and Sweet Eloquence have just announced the play's topic: to compare Mary to light and truly to understand this comparison are virtually beyond man's mental capacities; they thus indicating the ambitiousness of the journey upon which they are about to embark. Shortly thereafter, Imaginative Mind enters the playing area, making his way through the audience, while he recites a roundel ('rondeau' in French, 'rondeel' in Dutch) calling on Mary to grant him her grace. (He might as well be begging for alms.) The two characters already on stage order him to shut up, since he is hindering the audience from hearing the play. When he notices that they are going to compare Mary to light, he demonstrates his initial ignorance by wrongly interpreting the word 'clærheyte' ('clarity') to mean

136 McGinn "Visions and Visualizations" 233–234, 238; and Fraeters, "Visio/Vision" 180–187.

137 McGinn, "Visions and Visualizations" 235.

138 Fraeters, "Visio/Vision" 185.

139 Hahn, "Visio Dei" 169, 177–183; and Gill, "Augustine's Light" 38–39.

(the sound of) a trumpet and then (the scent and taste of) wine.¹⁴⁰ The word 'clærheyt' indeed is unisonous with 'clareit', a popular wine spiced with herbs. And a high-pitched trumpet might have been known by the term 'clærheyt' (or a homophone) as well. Despite or, perhaps better, thanks to his misinterpretations of the word 'clærheyt', Imaginative Mind is able to demonstrate how keenly developed his senses of hearing, smell and taste are. His reminiscences about the occasions when he registered the sound of that trumpet (on the feast of the Holy Blood in Bruges¹⁴¹) and heard the name of that wine, smelled and tasted it, show how much his mind is prone to imagination, to making analogies—or images—in order to express the impressions these perceptions made on his mind. Therefore it is no surprise that he shows great eagerness to learn about and imaginatively to visualize the clarity of light, especially after hearing that it will be compared to Mary, of whom he shows himself a fervent devotee. When Experiential Proof responds that he does not command all five senses, he stresses that he hears, touches, smells and tastes as well as anyone else.¹⁴² He challenges his discussants, asking rhetorically: 'Do I not have command of all my senses, as I should have / just as much as you, as can clearly be noted?'.¹⁴³ Although, Sweet Eloquence avows that he lacks the uppermost sense, and will therefore be unable 'to reach an exact understanding of light',¹⁴⁴ they nevertheless lift him onto the stage.¹⁴⁵ Apparently this character is deemed capable of compensating for his visual disability.

Once on stage, Imaginative Mind almost immediately takes the initiative by posing the first question to the triumvirate of discussants, which by now has been joined by Grounded Scripture.¹⁴⁶ He implores the latter to uncover the essence of the comparison between Mary and light. When Grounded Scripture asks him to identify himself, he answers:

140 Vss. 45–48; vss. 61b–66.

141 On this feast and its celebration in Bruges, see Brown A., *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges c. 1300–1520* (Cambridge: 2011), *passim*.

142 Vss. 73b–75a; vss. 75b–76.

143 Vss. 79–80: 'Hebbic myn zinnen niet, naer den betaeme, / alzo wel als ghy by sulcker bekenthede?.'

144 Vs. 84: 'van de clærheyt te begryppene trechte verstant'.

145 Vs. 94.

146 When she enters the stage, she is recognized by Imaginative Mind first, who speaks the line: 'I have seen her, that noble woman' ('Ic hebbese ghesien, de vrouwe weert'; vs. 100). It seems Everaert mistakenly put these words in the mouth of Imaginative Mind. Given the pattern of speech alternation, it seems more likely that it was Experiential Proof's turn to utter these words.

Imaginative Mind:
 to learn, without any limitation,
 with what clarity you intend
 to praise Mary this very moment,
 to what you wish to equate her through comparison:
 Is there more than one [clarity] within the created world?¹⁴⁷

The lines following the mention of his name seem intended to exemplify its meaning. Imaginative Mind wants to use his mind's imagination to learn about this intriguing comparison between Mary and light. In the last line he formulates his first question, urging his advisors to define the exact kind of clarity to which they are going to compare Mary. They mention the clarity (or light) of fire, of the moon and stars, of dawn and dusk, of shining gems, of lightning, even the clarity (because of their purity) of distilled or sieved substances, such as water, gold and silver. Bright-sounding instruments may be called clear as well.¹⁴⁸ But their enterprise centers on none these clarities. Rather, it is the 'perfect clarity' ('vulmaecte clærheyt'), later called the 'clarity above all clarities' ('clærheyt boven all clærheden'), that they firstly wish to cognize, the clarity to which all other clarities are subordinate.¹⁴⁹ This 'clærheyt' is nothing less than the primordial light created by God on the first day of creation (*Genesis* 1:3). Mary should be compared to it, for all other species of light or clarity to be discussed in the play are derived from this first light. Out of this primordial light came forth the light of the sun (*Genesis* 1:4), which Grounded Scripture compares to Christ. Thus, before the play proper has even formally begun, Mary is closely associated with creation, incarnation and salvation. So too, at the prologue's end, her spiritual significance will be exemplified by the unveiling of a tableau vivant of Queen Esther kneeling before Ahasuerus—the Old Testament type for Mary's position as intercessor in heaven. It is in this context that all that follows should be understood. Sweet Eloquence announces that she, together with Experiential Proof and Grounded Scripture, will explain 'the properties of light' ('de condicien des clærheyt'),¹⁵⁰ and

147 Vss. 120b–125: 'Ymagineirlic Gheest: / Om te wetene, zonder vercleenynghē, / van wat clærheyt dat ghy meenynghē / Maria te loven hebt te deser spaciē, / daer ghy huer by ghelycken wilt met comparaciē: / esser meer dan een binnen sweereelts bestiere?'

148 Vss. 126–139.

149 Vss. 141–142, 206.

150 Vs. 201.

Imaginative Mind declares that he shall apply his imagination in an effort to understand this light: 'My Imaginative Mind yearns for it', he says.¹⁵¹

As already noted, Eveaert's play consists of a series of discursive exchanges—nineteen to be precise—devoted to the various aspects of the comparison, in which the characters take turns according to a regular pattern. From the moment the prologue ends and the actual comparison starts, the clauses of the four characters alternate in near flawless rhythm. Of the nineteen sequences, each devoted to one aspect of the analogy, thirteen are triggered by Imaginative Mind, who either asks his discussants to expand on a natural property or effect of light, or offers praise to Mary (often in the form of a rhetorical question), referring to a particular characteristic that inspires another analogy. In a number of instances, a single word voiced by Imaginative Mind gets the other characters going. Sometimes even a correspondence in sound—through rhyme—does the trick. For example, the concluding line of one of Imaginative Mind's speeches—'Int hooren en can icx niet worden versadich' ('In hearing I cannot get enough')—provokes Experiential Proof to start his speech with the line, 'De clærheyt es een zuver wesen ghestadich' ('Light is a pure and constant entity'), in which 'versadich' ('enough') rhymes with 'ghestadich' ('constant'). Thus cued, Experiential Proof begins to expand on the brightness of light.¹⁵² He always speaks first, putting forward his scientific observations, after which Sweet Eloquence, in a heightened tone, links these observations to Mary's redemptive powers. Grounded Scripture follows, elaborating upon Sweet Eloquence's panegyric lines with theological references and citations. Occasionally, at the end of a sequence, Sweet Eloquence adds yet another clause.¹⁵³ Sometimes, halfway through a sequence, Experiential Proof speaks a second time in order to clarify a particular point of his scientific explanation.¹⁵⁴ Even in those instances when Imaginative Mind starts a sequence by asking his discussants to explain some aspect of Mary's spiritual significance instead of a property of natural light, Experiential Proof responds by describing the *tertium comparationis*, the abundance of light for example, in physical terms, after which Sweet Eloquence and Grounded Scripture connect this shared element with Mary, *in casu* with the abundant grace she obtains for mankind through intercession with God or Christ.

The nineteen sequences are devoted to the following analogies: 1) just as light enables man to distinguish between objects situated high above, in the

151 Vs. 202: 'Myn Ymagineirlic Gheest daernaer haect'.

152 Vss. 504–505.

153 Vss. 557–568, 599–604.

154 Vss. 651–653a.

middle and below, so too Mary, thanks to her intermediate position, helps man to distinguish between heaven and earth; 2) just as light by its purity enables man to see his actions and their effects, so too God made Mary stand out in purity so that through her He could effect our salvation; 3) just as light is unsurpassed in beauty, so too Mary is more beautiful than anything else; 4) just as light causes enchantment and vitality in nature, so too Mary enchants and enlivens every sort of man, whatever their condition on earth or in the hereafter; 5) just as the splendor and glory of light adorns everything upon which it shines, so too Mary's glory enlightens all heaven; 6) just as light shines on everyone and everything, so too Mary brings help and comfort to all; 7) just as the unchanging power of light is not felt everywhere with the same intensity because it is sometimes blocked, so too Mary's grace is unceasing, but does not touch everyone because of sin; 8) just as the velocity of light is higher than man can conceive, so too Mary immediately arrives whenever and wherever one prays for her help; 9) just as light penetrates even the tiniest aperture as soon as it shines, so too Mary enters the sinner's heart, however slight his cry; 10) just as light illuminates even the most secret places of man's body, so too Mary reaches into the deepest corners of man's mind; 11) just as the purity of light is unstained by the matter it touches and rather than staining matter, purifies it, so too Mary is unstained by the sins of those to whose rescue she comes, and instead delivers them from sin; 12) just as it is impossible for light and darkness to coincide, for the former inevitably casts out the latter, so too Mary's clarity expels the gloom of sin; 13) just as light is known to be good and noble in effect, so too Mary has an ennobling effect on mankind; 14) just as light is constant, whichever way the wind blows, so too Mary stood firm in the face of all adversity, and therefore was chosen by God to bear His son; 15) as light is abundant and rebounds from the surfaces it strikes, so Mary shines abundantly within the heart of man, her light refracted through the performance of good deeds, which serve as an example to sinners; 16) just as light makes plants grow and thus produces food, so too Mary brings the food of comfort; 17) just as light directs the paths of man and prevents him from straying, so too Mary leads man away from original sin, the heritage of Adam and Eve's disobedience; 18) just as light descends or emanates from air (like heat from fire and scent from herbs), and yet remains separable, so too Mary closely relates to the Trinity without becoming part of it; 19) just as the light of the highest air or sphere enables man to discover the secrets of the stars, so too Mary enables man to understand the secrets of the Trinity.¹⁵⁵

155 1) vss. 215–230; 2) vss. 231–242; 3) vss. 243–258; 4) vss. 259–281a; 5) vss. 281b–292; 6) vss. 293–316; 7) vss. 317–355a; 8) vss. 355b–382; 9) vss. 383–394; 10) vss. 395–402; 11) vss. 403–

Thus, Imaginative Mind's questions about the natural aspects of light (most of which he cannot see) are answered or, better, internally illumined, with the help of his imagination, by reference to supernatural characteristics of the Blessed Virgin, and, *vice versa*, her supernatural characteristics are explained through reference to the natural aspects of light. At this stage, both for him and for the audience, all discourse is conducted verbally and aurally. Imaginative Mind uses verbs such as 'segghen' ('to speak'), 'berechten' ('to teach with words'), 'vermonden' ('to put into words') and 'horen' ('to hear') to describe the kind of communication and reception taking place on stage.¹⁵⁶ Judging from his reactions, the analogies do not only have a rational effect on him. The more he learns about the correspondence between Mary and light, thus gradually exploring the spiritual meaning of the Blessed Virgin, the more exalted he becomes. In a number of cases Imaginative Mind, instead of asking questions about specific aspects of either light or Mary, expresses exaltation and offers praise of the Virgin. As already noted, sometimes a single word in one of these laudatory lines triggers his discussants to adduce another comparison, which in turn stirs up his imagination—and consequently his emotions—even further.

In a number of speeches Imaginative Mind indicates how he internally processes the verbal analogies presented to him. As early as the prologue, he refers to how the upcoming comparison between Mary and light 'internally touches all his thoughts'.¹⁵⁷ Further on he declares that 'his internal senses start to rejoice'.¹⁵⁸ Towards the beginning of the play proper, he speaks of his 'internal fundamentals'—his heart or soul—being 'delighted this very moment' by the words spoken by his discussants.¹⁵⁹ Towards the end of the play this mental process reaches a climax, his 'imagination'—this is the only time he refers literally to his internal sense—almost succumbing under the heavy weight of the duty it has to perform: 'All imagination now is melting in me'.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, according to the following line, cited above, he wants to hear more. Halfway through the eighteenth sequence, Sweet Eloquence expands on the relationship

440; 12) vss. 441–475a; 13) vss. 475b–502; 14) vss. 503–531a; 15) vss. 531b–568; 16) vss. 569–604; 17) vss. 605–628; 18) vss. 629–664; 19) vss. 665–687. Sequences 1, 4, 5–8, 11–16 and 18 start with a question or remark by Imaginative Mind. In sequences 2, 3, 9, 17 and 19 the analogy is initiated by Experiential Proof, introducing another physical property of light.

156 Vss. 217, 260, 282, 294, 445, 504, 632, 633.

157 Vs. 88: 'Ghy beroert inwendich al myn ghedochte'.

158 Vs. 146: 'Myn zinnen inwendighe beghunnen te verhueghenne'.

159 Vss. 259–260: 'Myn inwendighe gronden alsnu ten stonden / verblyden duer tvermonden dyns woorts belyden'.

160 Vs. 503: 'Alle ymaginacie alsnu in my smelt'.

between light and air by comparing it to that between heat and fire and scent and herbs. They belong together and yet are not absorbed into each other. He says to Imaginative Mind: 'In order better to instruct your mind, let this analogy stir your heart'.¹⁶¹

Light Metaphysics

As indicated, Everaert's ambition is to compare Mary first and foremost to the primordial light of creation, thus principally defining her as *Co-Redemptrix*, as *Mediatrix* between mankind and the Trinity. In doing this, he drew, as far as we can tell, on no source directly relating Mary to primordial light. Everaert derived his information—again, directly or indirectly—from works on either the *comparans* light or the *comparandam* Mary, from treatises on light metaphysics and optical theory on the one hand, and devotional texts—sermons, prayers, liturgical songs, *etcetera*—on the other. Of course, the Bible provided terms and metaphors for the description of both. Authorities in the first category linked light, especially the light created on the first and fourth day, to the Trinity and the hierarchies of angels, but not to Mary. Those in the second category linked Mary to light, its various sources and effects, but not to the light of creation, at least not to the primordial light of *Genesis* 1:3.

Some of Everaert's sources can be identified with reasonable precision, since in many places he quotes, paraphrases and explicitly refers to a number of authorities in both categories mentioned above.¹⁶² However, except for one instance, he never mentions a title. To the realm of the physics and metaphysics of light belong Aristotle (called the 'philosopher'—'phylosophe'), Seneca (called the 'wise man'—'wyse man'), Pseudo-Dionysius and Peter Lombard. To that of Mariology belong Hieronymus, Fulbert of Chartres, Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, the latter cited no fewer than six times.¹⁶³

161 Vss. 645–646: 'Updat ghy in tverstant te bet gheleert wort, / laet dese ghelyckenesse hu int herte woelen'.

162 Hüskens, *De Spelen* I, 37–39. Everaert quotes and / or refers to: *Genesis* 1:3 (vss. 152–157); *Proverbs* 8:23 (vss. 167–169); *Canticles* 4:7 (vss. 240, 249–250); *Psalms* 95:6 (vss. 280–281); *Luke* 1:27 (vs. 305); *Jeremiah* 33:6 (vss. 375–376); *Wisdom* 7:25–26 (vs. 438); *Genesis* 1:4 (vss. 465–467); *Wisdom* 7:10 (vs. 531); *Luke* 1:41 (vss. 559–560); and *Genesis* 6:7 (vs. 621).

163 Aristotle: vs. 401 (note: according to the editor 'phylosophe' here refers to Solomon); Seneca: vs. 438 (note: according to the editor 'wise man' refers to Solomon); Pseudo-Dionysius: vs. 482 (possibly also vs. 288, where he may be the authority referred to by 'phylosophe'); vs. 173; Hieronymus: vs. 549; Fulbert of Chartres: vs. 343; Anselm of Canterbury: vs. 695; and Bernard of Clairvaux: vss. 179, 281, 495, 499, 593, 685.

Augustine is cited twice with reference to the first and once with reference to the second area of expertise.¹⁶⁴ Everaert quotes from (or refers to) Scripture as well. In all likelihood he translated and paraphrased passages from the Vulgate.¹⁶⁵

The analogy between Mary and light corresponds to a number of ideas about the natural qualities of the latter. The most fundamental concept was that light performed a connecting and communicating function within the hierarchy of being.¹⁶⁶ It had all started in the beginning, when God said 'Let there be light' (*Genesis* 1:3) and 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens' (*Genesis* 1:14). The relation between these two moments is the first aspect of light the play deals with, in the prologue, even before the actual comparison has commenced. In fact, it leads to the first two analogies between Mary and light. Once Sweet Eloquence has established that 'perfect clarity' is the matter to be addressed, Imaginative Mind phrases his first two questions concerning its properties and characteristics, the second repeating the first: 'Was there light or clarity before the time and moment / the sun was made or created?' and 'was of this light [...] the sun made?'.¹⁶⁷ Imaginative Mind's discussants answer that God—the 'divine wisdom' ('godellicke wysheyt')—created light on the first day, a light, however, 'without rays and radiance' ('zonder scynsels of raysele'), from which He created the sun on the fourth.¹⁶⁸ Mary is identified with the former, Christ with the latter.¹⁶⁹ Mary's identification with divine knowledge is strengthened by a paraphrase—a conflation in fact, very freely adapted—of *Proverbs* 8:26–27: 'Before the earth was created or heaven's throne, / I was received in Gods eternal wisdom'.¹⁷⁰ Compared to the Latin original, the words 'Gods eternal wisdom' ('deeuweghe wysheyt Gods') are clearly added.

It is in the context of the creation of light that Everaert refers to Peter Lombard, 'the Master of the *Sentences*' ('de Meester der *Sentencien*') or *Sententiae*.¹⁷¹ They contained insights from contemporary science, mathematics

164 Augustine: vss. 433b, 471, 641.

165 Hüsken, *De Spelen* I, 35–37.

166 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 13, 29, 36–37.

167 Vss. 150–151: 'wasser licht of clærheyt, eer tyt of stonde / dat de zonne ghemaect was of ghescepen?'; vss. 171–172a: 'was van dese clærheyt [...] de zonne ghemaect?.'

168 Vss. 152, 162.

169 Vss. 166–169; vss. 176–179.

170 Vss. 168–169: 'Eer derde ghemaect was of shemels troone, / wassic in deeuweghe wysheyt Gods ontfanghen'.

171 Vs. 173. Lombard Peter, *The Sentences, Book 2: On Creation*, trans. G. Silano (Toronto: 2008).

and logic,¹⁷² attesting to the position of natural philosophy as a handmaiden to theology.¹⁷³ Lombard addresses the relation between the two forms of light mentioned in *Genesis* 1 and raises the question why God found it necessary to create light twice.¹⁷⁴ Light was created on the first day, so that all other things that were to be created could be seen.¹⁷⁵ Whilst during the first three days the four elements—earth, water, air and fire—were differentiated and ordered in their places, on the next three days they were adorned, beginning with the filling of the firmament with sun, moon and stars.¹⁷⁶ The latter were created to illuminate the lower part of creation, ‘so [it would] not be dark to its inhabitants.’¹⁷⁷ The light of the first day was associated with human intellect, whereas the light of sun, moon and stars was linked to sensory perception.¹⁷⁸

Another of Everaert’s sources may have been Bartholomew the Englishman’s *De proprietatibus rerum* (*On the Property of Things*). Bartholomew is not explicitly referred to, but Wim Hüsken, the play’s editor, points out a similarity between two lines by Sweet Eloquence and the eighth book of his work about the cosmos.¹⁷⁹ Like Lombard’s *Sentences*, *De proprietatibus rerum* was used as a guide to Scripture, but primarily from the angle of natural philosophy.¹⁸⁰ Like the former it was also widely disseminated in manuscript and print.¹⁸¹ Besides making the distinction between ‘lux’ as the substance of light and ‘lumen’ as the radiation emerging from it, thus providing a parallel for the distinction made by Everaert between ‘licht’ (‘light’) and ‘clærheyt’ (‘clarity’),¹⁸² Bartholomew

172 Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* 37–39, 160, 228–229, 239–240.

173 Ocker, “Scholastic Interpretation of the Bible” 257; and Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* 226.

174 Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs* 390. Also see Lombard, *The Sentences* 56 (XIII.5 (68).3–4).

175 Lombard, *The Sentences* 54 (XIII.1 (64)).

176 Ibid. 62 (xv.9 (79).2).

177 Ibid. 62 (xiv.10 (80)).

178 Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 57.

179 Vss. 600–601.

180 Bogaart S., *Geleerde kennis in de volkstaal*. Van den proprieteiten der dinghen (*Haarlem 1485*) in *perspectief* (Hilversum: 2004) 36.

181 Ibid. 37–38; and Meyer H., *Die Enzyklopädie des Bartholomäus Anglicus. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Rezeptionsgeschichte von De proprietatibus rerum* (Munich: 2000) 397–410.

182 Engelsman Bartholomeus, *Van de werelt ende van de materialike lichamen des hemels. Het achtste boek van Bartholomeus Anglicus’ De proprietatibus rerum in een Middelnederlandse vertaling. Uitgegeven naar de druk van Jacob Bellaert Haarlem 24 dec. 1985*, ed. I.M. Gondrie, 2 vols. (Utrecht: 1981) 154 (VIII.29), 158 (VIII, 30); and Bogaart, *Geleerde kennis in de volkstaal* 11. Also see the commentary by I.M. Gondrie, the editor of the Middle Dutch translation: Engelsman, *Van de werelt* 58–59.

mentions various characteristics of light referred to by Everaert as well, such as light being a spiritual substance of God and the angels, the fact that it makes things grow, and that it remains constant in all circumstances.¹⁸³

The blending of natural philosophy and theology, leading to a metaphysics of light, culminated in Robert Grosseteste's *De luce* (*On light*). Everaert does not refer to Grosseteste, but the latter's work is indispensable for a proper understanding of late medieval optical theory.¹⁸⁴ Its second part deals with the story of creation in terms of light.¹⁸⁵ Grosseteste defines it as the first corporeal form which, by touching matter, brought about the nine celestial spheres and the four spheres of fire, air, water and earth underneath them.¹⁸⁶ In fact, he considered the form—*species*—of all bodies to be light, 'but in the higher bodies it is more spiritual and simple, whereas in the lower bodies it is more corporeal and multiplied'.¹⁸⁷ Everaert's remark in the seventh sequence, that light is fast and omnipresent, only 'blocked / by high edifices such as churches, walls, / through the closing of windows, doors',¹⁸⁸ corresponds with Grosseteste's view that 'a point of light will produce instantaneously a sphere of light of any size whatsoever, unless some opaque object stands in the way'.¹⁸⁹ Since, according to Thomas Aquinas, God is essentially light (a view we encountered already in Augustine). His relationship with us is the same as that between light and men.¹⁹⁰

Grosseteste was very familiar with Pseudo-Dionysius, whose work was as intensively studied and commented upon as Lombard's *Sentences*.¹⁹¹ Everaert cites Dionysius at least once, probably from *De divinis nominibus* (*On the Divine Names*).¹⁹² He also seems to have been familiar with the latter's ideas on the order of angels, as described in *De caelesti hierarchia* (*On the Heavenly Hierarchy*).¹⁹³ Dionysius repeatedly draws analogies between natural and

183 Ibid. 134 (VIII.17), 153–154 (VIII.29); and Bogaart, *Geleerde kennis in de volkstaal* 35.

184 Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment* 67–68.

185 Grosseteste Richard, *On Light* (*De Luce*), ed. C.C. Riedl (Milwaukee, WI: 1978 [1942]) 6.

186 Ibid. 11, 13; Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 19, 157; and Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 214.

187 Grosseteste, *On Light* 15.

188 Vss. 326–327: 'beweert / by hooghe edeficien als kercken, mueren, / by tbutensluten van veynsteren, dueren'.

189 Grosseteste, *On Light* 10; Grosseteste, *On the Six Days of Creation* 97; and Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs* 42.

190 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 231–232.

191 Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 257.

192 Vss. 482–483.

193 Vs. 288. Also see vs. 229.

divine light.¹⁹⁴ Referring to the apocryphal gospel of *James* (1:17), he argued that natural light, like the Trinity, retained its unity, despite distributing itself to all things, which corresponds with another view from the seventh sequence.¹⁹⁵ The idea put forward in the eleventh sequence, that fire consumes objects, clearing away all impurities, without itself becoming corrupted, can be found in another important source on medieval light metaphysics, the thirteenth-century *Liber de intelligentiis*.¹⁹⁶ Because of light's ability to spread its rays instantaneously, Thomas Aquinas called it an 'instrumentum caeli', which through its radiation enabled both generation and decline of life. This generative potential of light is described by Everaert in the sixteenth sequence.¹⁹⁷ When Imaginative Mind calls Mary a 'glittering ruby' ('blyncgende robyne'),¹⁹⁸ thus initiating the fifteenth sequence, Experiential Proof starts expanding on the reflecting qualities of the clear (cleaned and polished) surfaces of stones, a topic which was also addressed in contemporary optics.¹⁹⁹

The nineteenth and last analogy is by far the most complicated of all. Although one is tempted in this analogy as well as in the previous one to translate 'lucht' as 'light', it probably means 'air'—its predominant meaning in Middle Dutch—and more specifically 'aerial layer', 'sphere' or 'heaven'. The nineteenth sequence starts with the following speech by Experiential Proof:

The air, as one may observe from experience,
of fire forms the highest firmament.
And the light of this air is known to be
the right means that provides all knowledge,
because the knowledge of it gives knowledge to all that lives.
By which knowledge, as a means, the secrets of the heavens are explored.
It also accomplishes all activities of the human mind.²⁰⁰

194 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 222.

195 Vss. 319–330; Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 226.

196 Vss. 420–424; Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 160.

197 Vss. 573–583; Hedwig, *Sphaera Lucis* 202–203.

198 Vs. 532.

199 Vss. 533–540; Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 230.

200 Vss. 665–672: 'De lucht, zo men zien mach by experientie, / van den viere es tupperste firmament. Ende de claeerheit van der lucht die es bekent / de rechte middel die alle kennessen gheeft, / want huer kenneesse gheeft kenneesse al dat leift. / By wiens kenneesse, als middel, wort besocht / de secreten der hemelen. Ooc worden vulbrocht alle ghewercken in smeinschens verstant'. My interpretation and translation differs from that by Steenbrugge, who, following the editor's annotation, translates 'lucht' with 'light'. Steenbrugge C., "Physical Sight and Spiritual Light in Three Sixteenth-Century Plays

The aerial sphere of fire brings forth the light that inspired human intellect, which in turn is employed to discover the secrets of heaven. Light helps the human mind to function in general. Remarkable is the frequency of the word 'kennesse(n)' ('knowledge')—four times in three lines—thus stressing the link among light, intellection and Mary.²⁰¹ In fact, we find the word scattered throughout the play, just as the word 'verstant', which may refer either to the instrument ('mind', 'intelligence') or the result ('understanding') of intellection.²⁰²

In the speech that follows, Sweet Eloquence makes the link with Mary, calling her the 'middel' ('means of communication' or 'medium') between man and the Trinity. Just as the light of the human intellect enables man to discover the secrets of the stars, so too Mary enables man to understand the secrets of the Trinity. He extends the analogy by calling Christ 'the highest sphere' ('dupperste lucht').²⁰³ And he concludes the analogy as follows: 'Just as the air is filled with light, / so too you [Mary] have received the highest, God's son, / in your precious blessed body'.²⁰⁴ In other words: by bringing forth Christ, she leads us to knowledge about the Trinity. In fact, Everaert turns the analogy around: Christ now is the light and Mary the aerial sphere that produces him.

When Everaert speaks of 'the air [...] of fire' that is 'the highest firmament', identifying it with Christ, calling him 'the highest air', he may simply mean the sky above the earth, as it is described in *Genesis* 1:7. Grosseteste in his *Hexaëmeron* (*On the Six Days of Creation*) wrote that 'Christ and the ranks of heaven [...] are like the firmament'.²⁰⁵ But Everaert might as well be referring to one of the spheres or orbs which according to medieval cosmology surrounded the earth, one inside the other, concentrically. The first of these spheres was formed by the elements of water, air and fire.²⁰⁶ Then came the

of the Low Countries", *Marginalia* 3 (2006), electronic article, www.marginalia.co.uk/journal/o6illumination/steenbrugge.php/, accessed August 21, 2013. Although 'lucht' could mean 'light' in medieval West-Flemish, it usually refers to 'air'. Moreover, why would Everaert use 'lucht' to mean 'light', where in four instances he uses the word 'licht' (vss. 150, 154, 512, 701)?

201 Vss. 668–670; Steenbrugge, "Physical Sight and Spiritual Light".

202 Vss. 19, 219, 256, 459, 546, 668–670, 675 ('kennesse(n)'); vss. 11, 40, 74, 84, 214, 219, 397, 566, 645, 672 ('verstant').

203 Vs. 680.

204 Vss. 682–684: 'Want zo by der claeheyte de lucht es bevanghen, / so hebt ghy den uppersten Gods Zuene ontfanghen / in hu precious lichaerne ghebenendyt'.

205 Grosseteste, *On the Six Days of Creation* 196.

206 Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* 141.

celestial spheres, starting with the seven planetary spheres.²⁰⁷ The sphere meant by Everaert must be one associated with fire and light, though probably not the one formed by the element fire, that one being too close to earth. Could it be the eighth sphere then, that of the fixed stars, where Dante in his *Divina Comedia* (*Divine Comedy*) witnessed 'the luminous triumphs of Christ and Mary'?²⁰⁸ Or does he mean the ninth, where Dante saw God and the angelic hierarchies 'as a point of light surrounded by the nine fiery circles'?²⁰⁹ He might even hint at the eleventh or outermost sphere, the empyrean heaven, which was described as 'a place of dazzling luminosity'.²¹⁰ Still another option is that Everaert thought of aether, the fifth element or quintessence, which was supposed to carry light from the highest parts of the cosmos to the lowest. It also became identified with the cosmos at large, with Christ even, and was known to form a separate sphere, too.²¹¹ Bartholomew the Englishman defines it as follows: 'the aetherial sky according to some masters is called the highest firmament of the air, which is directly connected to the sphere of fire'.²¹²

Mariology

Of all doctors of the church, none was as strongly associated with Mary as Bernard of Clairvaux, an association based on the popularity of the iconographical themes of the *lactatio* and the *amplexus*, as well as on a number of eloquently phrased texts and passages. Despite its flowery, exalted formulation, Bernard's views fit into a traditional theology that is biblical and sober.²¹³ The Cistercians' link with Mary was manifested in their abbots' custom of preaching on Marian feast days: the Annunciation, Purification, Nativity and Assumption.²¹⁴ Bernard himself was no exception to this rule. One of the six

207 Ibid. 143.

208 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 217.

209 Ibid.

210 Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* 144. Also see Lombard, *The Sentences* II (II.4 (10).5).

211 Böhme – Böhme, *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft* 143–145, 147.

212 Engelsman, *Van der werelt* 100 (VIII.2): 'Celum etherum hiet na sommigen meysters dat alre overste onderscot der luchten, twelc sonder middel versament is mitten spere des viers'.

213 Bell, *Bernardus dixit* 296; and Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 215.

214 Casey M., "Reading Saint Bernard: The Man, the Medium, the Message", in McGuire B.P. (ed.), *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 25 (Leiden – Boston: 2001) 62–107, esp. 86.

references made to him in the play may concern a passage on Mary's humility taken from the *Homiliae super evangelio Missus est angelus Gabriel*, though Everaert does not refer to this work explicitly.²¹⁵ The *Homiliae* do not consist of verbatim versions of Bernard's sermons, but are literary adaptations in the exuberant style that became Bernard's hallmark.²¹⁶ They became widely disseminated in both manuscript and print.

It was very common to compare the relationship between Mary and Christ in terms of the sun, the moon and the stars created on the fourth day. Alain de Lille, for example, compared Mary to the moon and to a star because she gave birth to Christ, the 'Sun of Justice'.²¹⁷ The liturgy—prayers and chants at Mass and the Divine Office—provided a lot of metaphors for Mary, light being one of them. From the tenth century onwards a number of Marian tropes—embellishments of the sung responses of the Mass, such as the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei—became extremely popular. The one containing the most light metaphors was the *Ave Maris Stella* (*Hail Star of the Sea*): 'Hail most bright star of the sea, a light for the nations, [...] Queen of heaven, outstanding as the sun, beautiful as the flesh of the moon [...].'²¹⁸ It seemed obvious that Mary (and/or Christ) should be compared to the moon and the sun, since, given the quantity of light comprised by them, they were thought to affect lower bodies more than any of the other planets.²¹⁹ Conrad of Saxony, inspired by *Canticles* 6:10—a treasure house of Marian metaphors—compared Mary to the dawn, the moon and the sun, and praised her 'luminous virginity', her 'luminous fruitfulness' and her 'luminous uniqueness'.²²⁰ Jean Gerson called her *Illuminatrix*, who bestows light because of her natural generosity. He even explained her name etymologically as 'star of the sea'.²²¹ Besides the sun, the moon and the stars, the rainbow also provided a powerful metaphor for Mary, especially for her role as *Mediatrice* who bridges the distance

215 Vss. 178–179.

216 Casey, "Reading Saint Bernard" 87.

217 Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 146.

218 'Ave praeclara maris stella, / in lucem gentium [...] regina coeli, / praelecta ut sol, / pulchra lunaris ut fulgor [...]. Gambero L., *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Th. Buffer (San Francisco: 2005) 69; Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 200–201.

219 Gilson, *Medieval Optics* 187, and n. 44; and also see 208–209, 218, 224, for examples of light imagery in Dante's description of creation, the Trinity, and its relation to man in the *Divina Comedia*.

220 Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages* 218.

221 Ibid. 283–284.

between God and man.²²² The close analogy to the Trinity which dominates the nineteenth sequence of the comparison was very eloquently described and explained by Raymond Lull. All three persons of the Trinity, he said, were present at the Annunciation: God the Father when the angel greeted her, the Holy Spirit when he breathed himself into her, and Christ when he took flesh from her.²²³

The Franciscans (and from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards the Dominicans, too) also stimulated Marian devotion. Among them were Bonaventure, Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus, the latter becoming a champion of the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception.²²⁴ Bonaventure, like Bernard, stressed her central role in the salvation process, as *Co-Redemptrix* interceding on man's behalf.²²⁵ He distinguished between three degrees of honor due to God, the saints and Mary, using the terms *latria* (adoration), *dulia* (veneration) and *hyperdulia* (deep veneration). The first was to be offered to God and Christ, the second to the saints, the third to Mary. She deserved this extra veneration because of her unique position.²²⁶ At the moment of conception, her soul was infused with sympathy and clarity, exempting her from original sin.²²⁷

Thus, we see how the cosmological insights discussed in the previous paragraph entered Marian metaphors and became integrated in the liturgy and theology of the Blessed Virgin, stimulating fervent devotion toward her. This becomes particularly apparent in Everaert's play at the moments of heightened attention accompanying disclosure of the two tableaux vivants. The first, which appears at the end of the prologue and portrays Queen Esther kneeling before Ahasuerus, is announced by Grounded Scripture, who paraphrases the first line of the responsory *Felix namque*: 'All worthy, / blessed Mary, art thou of praise / since from thy light has risen / the sun, Christ, who has taken away / Satan's power by His holy might'.²²⁸ Just a few lines before he has concluded the comparison of Mary to the primordial light in *Genesis* 1:3 and that

222 Ibid. 201, 279.

223 Ibid. 260.

224 Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 228, 231; and Rubin M., *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: 2010) 197–198.

225 Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 215, 238; and Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages* 149, 152, 228.

226 Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 237–238; Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages* 213, 231.

227 Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven* 361.

228 Vss. 184–188: 'Alle weerdichede, / ghebenendyde Maria, zyt ghy om loven / want uut hu clærheyt es gheresen te boven / de zonne, Christus, die syvants macht / benomen heift by Zyn heleghe cracht'. In Latin the first line reads: 'Felix namque es, sacra Virgo Maria, et omni laude dignissima, quia ex te ortus est sol justitiae, Christus Deus noster' ('For thou

of Christ to the sun in *Genesis* 1:4, calling Him 'the sun of justice' ('de zonne der rechtvaerdichede'),²²⁹ exactly the same epithet as can be found in the responsory. Grounded Scripture introduces his paraphrase of the first line as follows: 'The holy church sings:' ('De heleghe kerck synghet:'), thus suggesting that during the presentation of the living image, following his speech, the *Felix namque* was indeed sung. Through the performance of this responsory, Everaert intended to underline not just Mary's intercessional role *per se*, but also the basis for it in the creation of light as described in *Genesis* 1. Its presence also reveals his familiarity with the liturgy of the major Marian feasts and with the liturgy of the Hours, particularly the so-called Little Office of the Virgin. Most of its content was taken from the liturgy of these feasts, particularly that of the Assumption (15 August).²³⁰ Moreover, the Little Office establishes her in a number of roles, but primarily in that of the *Mediatrice* between heaven and earth, interceding on man's behalf before the Trinity.²³¹

Felix namque was sung on both the Assumption and the Nativity of the Virgin (8 September), and was part of the Little Office as well.²³² A further indication of how much the liturgy of these feasts must have been present in Everaert's mind while composing the play is *Proverbs* 8:22–35, from which Grounded Scripture paraphrases two verses, some twenty lines before quoting from *Felix namque*. The same passage formed one of the readings for that same feast of the Nativity, the liturgy of which contained multiple references to her motherhood of Christ.

Marian antiphons were sung almost daily,²³³ especially in churches and chapels devoted to her, where chantries were established in her honor. The collegiate church of Our Lady in Bruges possessed a very rich tradition of Marian chant. Every Saturday its clergy sang a Lady-mass.²³⁴ Mary of Burgundy, whose remains were buried there, had established a chantry, stipulating, among other things, the daily singing of a Marian mass after matins in discant, with two

art happy, O holy Virgin Mary, and art worthy of all praise, for out of thee arose the Sun of justice, Christ our God').

229 Vs. 177.

230 Baltzer R.A., "The Little Office of the Virgin and Mary's Role in Paris", in Fassler M.E. – Baltzer R.A. (eds.), *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies, Regional Developments, Hagiography* (Oxford: 2000) 463–484, esp. 466.

231 Ibid. 470–471.

232 Ibid. 468, 475.

233 Haggh B., "Nonconformity in the Use of Cambrai Cathedral: Guillaume Du Fay's Foundations", in Fassler – Baltzer (eds.), *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages* 372–397, esp. 384; and Brown, *Civic Ceremony* 111–112.

234 Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: 1990) 43.

voices or parts sung in consonant intervals.²³⁵ Everaert must have heard the *confraternitas chori* of the church sing at many occasions. After all, the chamber of The Three Saints, of which he was a member, had its chapel there.²³⁶ The clergy of the parish church of St. Saviour likewise had a *confraternitas chori*, this one dedicated to Mary's Assumption.²³⁷ When the annual procession of the Holy Blood passed the church of Our Lady, *Felix namque* was sung, 'a tune probably everyone in Bruges knew, so often does it occur in the liturgies of the various churches'.²³⁸ The Annunciation was one of the topics that was staged as a tableau vivant in the procession. The actors sang Marian chants written on the banderols they were holding.²³⁹

Ultimate Vision, Ultimate Knowledge

At the end of nineteenth sequence Grounded Scripture, Experiential Proof and Sweet Eloquence begin to prepare Imaginative Mind for his ultimate experience of the analogy between Mary and light: the tableau vivant in which the comparison culminates. According to a stage direction, the tableau consists of the Blessed Virgin standing—perhaps even hovering—between heaven and earth, between the Trinity enthroned above and mankind situated below. Three rays of light, coming from the mouths of the three divine persons—banderols perhaps, carrying Marian texts, such as those used in the procession of the Holy Blood—shine down on Mary's head, while a fourth ray, coming from her own mouth, descends earthward. By way of conclusion—'mind the conclusion' ('verstaetet slot'),²⁴⁰ says Sweet Eloquence—all three discussants stress her mediating position verbally, quoting Bernard of Clairvaux and Anselm of Canterbury. Possibly, the living image is disclosed already at the moment when Grounded Scripture quotes an unidentified passage from the former's work, containing the words: 'behold the light, Mary' ('ansiet de claerheyte, Maria').²⁴¹ But it is definitely revealed when Grounded Scripture emphatically exclaims: 'Open your eyes, fall to your knees' ('Opent hu ooghen, valt up hu knyen').²⁴²

²³⁵ Ibid. 49.

²³⁶ Ibid. 47.

²³⁷ Ibid. 51.

²³⁸ Ibid. 5–6.

²³⁹ Ibid. 6–7.

²⁴⁰ Vs. 692.

²⁴¹ Vs. 687.

²⁴² Vs. 697.

All kneel and join in the declamation of a sophisticated panegyric on Mary in retrograde verse, in which the words 'darkness', 'light' and 'clarity' abound. The first or last line of each stanza is a variant of the opening words of the Annunciation: 'Hail Mary, glittering light' ('Ghegroet weist, Maria, clearheyty blynckende') (*Luke* 1:28).²⁴³

The iconography of the living image shows the influence of various categories of Marian iconography. As far as her position between heaven and earth is concerned, representations come to mind of her celestial appearances, such as the Assumption, or as Mary in the Sun, which was inspired by the woman from *Revelation* 12:1–6: 'And a great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars'. Mary in the Sun often appeared as the subject of woodcuts in popular prayer books, such as *Onser lieuer vrouwen croon* (*Our Blessed Lady's Crown*) [Fig. 11.1]. There are derivations from Annunciation imagery as well,²⁴⁴ especially the three rays coming from the Trinity that shine down on Mary's head. The paraphrase of the first words of the *Ave Maria* (*Hail Mary*), in the laudatory poem accompanying the image, hints at this as well. The tableau shares elements with one kind of Annunciation iconography in particular: the so-called *conceptio per aurem* ('conception through the ear'), whereby the trajectory of Christ's decent along rays of light leads not to Mary's womb, but to her ear. It was probably triggered by the notion of Christ being the *Logos* ('Word'), according to *John* 1:1, and possibly also by *Ecclesiasticus* 24:3.²⁴⁵ In fact, the opening verses of chapter 24 perfectly capture the cosmological dimensions of Mary's relation to the Trinity, as exemplified in the second analogy of the prologue and in the nineteenth analogy of the play:

Wisdom shall praise herself, and shall glory in the midst of her people.
In the congregation of the most High shall she open her mouth, and triumph before his power.
I came out of the mouth of the most High, and covered the earth as a cloud.
I dwelt in high places, and my throne is in a cloudy pillar.
I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep.

243 Vs. 716.

244 See the commentary by the play's editor on the stage direction above vs. 700.

245 Mak J.J., *Middeleeuwse kerstvoorstellingen* (Utrecht – Brussels: 1948) 33.



FIGURE 11.1 *"Mary in the Sun," woodcut illustration to Een suuerlic boeckken van onser liever Vrouwen croon (Leiden: Jan Seversz., after 1513), The Hague, Royal Library: 228 G 1, f. Av.*

IMAGE © PROQUEST LLC.

Although the 'I' in these verses is normally identified with Christ, the text might as well apply to Mary, given her position between heaven and earth and her association with divine wisdom and knowledge in the aforementioned analogues.²⁴⁶ If the rays were banderols containing texts, either in Latin or Middle Dutch, those coming from the Trinity possibly had passages from the Ave Maria painted on them, whereas the one coming from Mary might have

²⁴⁶ Vss. 152, 169.

contained her final response to that message: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (*Luke* 1:38). But equally appropriate were *Proverbs* 8:26–27, paraphrased by Grounded Scripture in the second analogy of the prologue, which explicitly links Mary to the divine wisdom that brought forth, and was shown in, creation. She was not just the *Sedes Sapientiae* ('Throne of Wisdom'), but the embodiment of wisdom itself.²⁴⁷

This tableau vivant is an example of what Sixten Ringbom calls an 'imaginative devotion'. He argues that miniatures of Mary in the Sun (among others) functioned as apparitions to the owners of the medieval books of hours in which they featured. These were no mystics or visionaries to whom Mary had really appeared. They merely envisaged such scenes as part of their devotional life, imagining them—and having them painted in their prayer books—as if they were real visions.²⁴⁸ In late medieval devotional art we come across scenes comparable to that with Imaginative Mind genuflecting before a tableau vivant of Mary and the Trinity, reciting words of praise, scenes in which lay donors are likewise represented looking up at Mary in the Sun, suggesting that they possess spiritual vision.

Although Imaginative Mind is explicitly called upon to open his eyes, there is no indication in the text that he is suddenly been cured of his blindness. On the contrary, I believe that at this point he too was seen to exercise spiritual vision and inner sight. The image in question is especially suited to stimulate such vision. Styled after *Revelation* 12, its meditative purpose becomes even more apparent. Augustine characterized this Bible book as a prime example of spiritual vision, the intermediate level in his tripartite theory of vision.²⁴⁹ Given the intellectual overtones of the play—material light and sight leading to human knowledge, spiritual light and sight leading to divine knowledge, with Mary as the means of going from one level to the next—one might wonder whether Imaginative Mind, in this final moment, achieves a state of intellectual vision in the Augustinian sense, moving from *scientia* to *sapientia* in its purest form, the state of knowledge identified with divinity itself. Grosseteste spoke of the mind ascending 'to the contemplation of the Trinity', bringing back 'a light of fear from the power of the Father, a light of knowledge from the wisdom of the Son, and a light of love from the kindness of the Holy Spirit'.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality* 74–75.

²⁴⁸ Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions" 166.

²⁴⁹ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.6 ff.; Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I saw'?" 6–7; and Minnis, "Medieval Imagination and Memory" 246.

²⁵⁰ Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 141–142.

Light was thought of as establishing a direct link between God, exemplified in the Trinitarian image.²⁵¹

Everaert identifies Mary with that light. His play testifies to the high level of theological as well as devotional sophistication that the urban middle classes had reached by the early sixteenth century. The fact that it was written for the occasion of a widely attended urban religious festival, in a well-known and broadly practiced theatrical genre, and in competition with like-minded and equally spirited laymen, all trying their best to compare Mary to light, may serve as proof of the established and pervasive character of their religious ambitions, as well as of their literary prowess in expressing and further developing them. As stated, the competition of plays for which Everaert wrote his work was linked to the annual Corpus Christi procession held in the town of Nieuwpoort. Like the procession, the contest was a public, communal celebration of lay civic character. Though blind, Imaginative Mind is presented as an example to the audience; he literally comes out of their midst.²⁵² What he aims for, they should aim for as well; what he achieves, they can achieve too.

Although this and other comparisons—such as the allegorical plays of the rhetoricians in general—follow the structure of the scholastic disputation and employ personifications that act out an argument,²⁵³ thus putting a rational stamp on the genre, all this reasoning on the basis of both the natural world and Scripture was driven by, and by the end of the plays led to, affective piety on the part of the main character whose striving for knowledge forms the impetus for the stage action. If a statue of the Blessed Virgin was indeed present on or somewhere near the stage during the play, it could have featured as a reminder or perhaps even as the addressee of the plays in which she was compared to the light—light which, in Everaert's contribution, clarified the main character's mind, through both its natural and spiritual meanings and effects, and offered him the opportunity to see Mary not only analogically, through imagination, but also directly, in a vision, casting his inner eye past or through her, at the Trinity, before which she interceded on his behalf.

251 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition* 70.

252 In the other comparisons, the mankind characters expressly present themselves as representatives of the burgher class. Request to Know (*Besouck om Weten*) from *Saint Peter Compared to the Dove*, is a male character dressed 'like a burgher' ('als een poorter'; Hüskén, *De Spelen* 11, 679, above vs. 1), while Joyous Desire (*Jonstich Begheerren*) from *Mary Compared to the Throne of Solomon*, is dressed 'like an honest burgher or alderman' ('als een eerlic poortere ofte wethouder'; see Hüskén, *De Spelen* 11, 596, above vs. 1).

253 Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge" 11.

Thus, the Mary presented to us by Everaert is not so much 'Mary, local and familiar', but rather 'Mary the sublime' and 'Mary: unlike any other', to quote three chapter titles of Mary Rubin's recent book *Mother of God*. The Mary we encounter in this play is not the one who 'took on increasingly the features of daily life,'²⁵⁴ not the wonder-worker of the miracle plays, nor the weeping mother underneath the cross of many passion plays.²⁵⁵ The shift from Latin to the vernacular and her institutionalized veneration within civic confraternities such as the chambers of rhetoric certainly made her more approachable, but did not necessarily go hand in hand with simplification and vulgarization. Everaert and his fellow rhetoricians in a way belie what Rubin calls 'the poetic impossible' of Mary, the 'impossibility of capturing [her] fullness.'²⁵⁶ They were up to the challenge.

To conclude, I would like to elucidate the meaning of Imaginative Mind by comparing this character to the Dreamer in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and, of course, to his near namesake in that poem, Ymaginatif, who acts as one of the Dreamer's advisors.²⁵⁷ Like Imaginative Mind, Ymaginatif represents the reasoning power of the imagination, the *vis imaginativa*.²⁵⁸ He is described as the faculty that produces images, but also as the ability to compare and analyze these images rationally.²⁵⁹ Drawing analogies and associations has been called a distinctive trait of his verbal actions.²⁶⁰ We can also compare Imaginative Mind to the Dreamer, who is taught by Ymaginatif how to use his imaginative faculty. In comparable ways, Imaginative Mind is instructed by his three discussants to imagine Mary's spiritual significance by comparing her to a natural, sensory phenomenon—light—the natural properties of which are described to him with empirical precision. Let me conclude, then, by paraphrasing Alastair Minnis's description of the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman* and applying it to Imaginative Mind: in the end his imagination, through the images of the things present to the exterior senses, moves his will to stimulate reason, so that it considers (or beholds) Mary spiritually, as *Mediatrix*. Like the Dreamer, his imaginative vision is stimulated, and he is brought to intellectual

254 Rubin, *Mother of God* 199.

255 Ibid. 199, 197–256.

256 Ibid. 280.

257 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 82.

258 Kaulbach, "The 'Vis Imaginativa'" 26–27; and Kaulbach "The 'Vis Imaginativa secundum Avicennam'" 496.

259 Kaulbach, "The 'Vis Imaginativa'" 28.

260 Hanna III R., "Langland's Ymaginatif: Images and the Limits of Poetry", in: Dimnick – Simpson – Zeeman, *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm* 81–94, esp. 82, 84–85.

vision in as far as the personifications advising him explain the significance of visible and invisible things, culminating in that particular vision based on *Revelation*.²⁶¹

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261 Minnis, "Langland's Ymaginatif" 83, 94.

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The Fountain of Life in Molinet's *Roman de la rose moralisé* (1500)

Michael Randall

The question of interpretation, of how to read correctly, plays a crucial part in the *Roman de la rose moralisé* (*RRM*) written by Jean Molinet during the last years of the fifteenth century, and published in 1500.¹ In this work, Molinet converts Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung's verse *Roman de la rose*, (1235 c. and 1275 c.) into prose, and divides it up into chapters, at the end of which he offers Christian 'moralizations'. These moralizations transform the underlying tale, often dealing with highly carnal love, into a much more spiritual form of love. Molinet explains that other critics who had read the *Rose* and disapproved of it, such as Jean Gerson, had not understood its true 'moral' meaning. Molinet claimed that Gerson had not bothered to peel off the *Rose*'s rind (*escorce*) and shell (*coquille*) and thus had not found its most delicious and very good kernel (*cerneau moult bon & fort friant*).² If the question of

1 For *Roman de la Rose moralisé*, see Devaux J. "L'art de la mise en prose à la cour de Bourgogne. Jean Molinet, dérivé du Roman de la Rose", in Thiry C. – Van Hemelryck T. (eds.), *La Littérature à la cour de Bourgogne. Actualités et Perspective de Recherche, Actes du Ier colloque international du Groupe de recherche sur le moyen français, Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, 8–9–10 mai 2003, Le Moyen Français* 57–58 (2005–2006) 87–104; Devaux J. "De l'Amour profane à l'amour sacré: Jean Molinet et sa version moralisée du *Roman de la Rose*", in Herbin J.-C. (ed.), *Image et mémoire du Hainaut médiéval* (Valenciennes: 2004) 21–32; Frieden P., *La Lettre et le miroir: écrire l'histoire d'actualité selon Jean Molinet* (Paris: 2013). Thanks to Jean Devaux, who very generously read the manuscript of this article and provided valuable comments. Thanks also to Emrys Schlatter for proof-reading Latin translations. All translations, and mistakes, are mine.

2 Molinet Jean, *Cest le romant de la rose moralise cler et net translate de rime en prose par vostre humble molinet* (Lyon, Guillaume Balsarin: 1503) f. 151r. Jean Devaux remarks: 'L'essentiel de l'effort mené par Molinet tient cependant à la portée spirituelle et morale qu'il entend conférer au *Roman de la Rose*. Il en est convaincu, cette œuvre allégorique recèle, bien au-delà de sa signification profane, une dimension mystique qu'il convient de mettre au jour', Devaux J., "De L'amour profane" 25.

interpretation, of how to read correctly is at the heart of the *RRM*, the incarnation of the word into flesh is at the very heart of the question of interpretation.³

The Fountain of Life in the *RRM*

In the *Rose*, Jean de Meung had created a garden called the 'park of the pretty field' (*parc du champ joly*) in which he placed a fountain that represented the regenerative powers of natural necessity.⁴ This fountain of life guaranteed the regeneration of the human species through the powers of fornication. In the *Rose*, Nature's deacon, Genius, excommunicates all those who do not want to follow the commandments of Nature. If they were not willing to accept the idea that they were supposed to fornicate in order to guarantee the regeneration of the species, they were excluded from the 'parc du champ joly' (f. 134 r.). Molinet's *RRM* replicates Genius's park but makes it clear, instead, that it is a Christian garden. Those who do not accept the rule of Christian providence are excluded from the park and cannot enjoy the waters of eternal life offered by the fountain. The question of who is in and who is cast out from the garden of Christian salvation constitutes the thematic thread joining all these chapters in the *RRM*. Molinet places the incarnation at the very heart of this fountain of life.

In chapter 97 of the *RRM*, Molinet describes the Fountain of Life as flowing from three sources representing the Christian trinity.⁵ In the following chapter,

3 On history of the incarnation in Christian theology see Ottley R.L., *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: 1946). On the human nature of Jesus Christ and its importance in Christian theology see Tschipke T., OP, *L'Humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité*, trans. P. Secrétan (Fribourg: 2003).

4 On transformation of natural necessity in the *RRM*, see Randall M. "Une Autre Querelle", ou la moralisation de Nature dans le *Roman de la Rose moralisé*", in Devaux J. – Doudet E. – Lecupre-Desjardin E. (eds.), *Jean Molinet et son temps. Actes des rencontres internationales de Dunkerque, Lille et Gand (8–10 novembre 2007)*, Brepols, Burgundica 22 (Turnhout: 2013) 263–74.

5 'Merveille n'est se la sainte trinite est a ceste eaue acomparee/ car ainsi comme la fontaine engendre le ruissel et l'estang vient tant de lung comme de lautre et n'est qu'une mesme eaue. Semblablement le pere engendra le filz et le saint esprit procede des deux et ne font qu'ung seul dieu en trois personnes', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé*, f. 139r. 'It is no wonder that the holy trinity is compared with this water because just as the fountain gives birth to the stream and the pond comes as much from one as the other. And it is still the same water. Similarly the father gave birth to the son, and the holy sprit proceeds from the two, and they create a single god in three persons.' The Biblical sources of the fountain of life are many,

Molinet takes a stone found in the basin of the fountain in Jean de Meung's *Rose* and brings it to life through the sort of paranomasic poetics for which he, and other Rhétoriqueur poets active at the end of the Middle Ages, were famous. Molinet begins the process by taking the stone, called a *charbouble* (carbuncle or ruby), and transforming it into a *charbon ardent* (burning coal). He then takes the process of linguistic resemblance further, by giving life to the word *charbon*, transforming it into the *chair bonne* (good flesh) of Jesus Christ.⁶ The transformation of *charbouble* into *chardon* and then into *chair bonne* is grounded in an old tradition rooted in Pliny's *Natural History*. Pliny associated the carbuncle or ruby with *charbon ardent*, or burning coal.⁷ This poetic incarnation of the word *charbouble* in the fountain of life becomes the 'cornerstone' on which the interpretive issues at stake depend.

Molinet's transformation of the word carbuncle into the living flesh of Jesus Christ allows him to overcome a formal problem inherent in a literary depiction

including *Psalms* 36:9: 'For with thee is the fountain of life: in the light we shall we see light', *Isaiah* 12:3: 'Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation'; *Proverbs* 14:27: 'The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death'; *The Song of Songs* 4:15: 'A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon'; *Zechariah* 13:1: 'In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness'; and *Revelation* 22:1: 'And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb', *The Holy Bible* (Nashville, 1982). All biblical quotations are from this edition.

6 The title of this chapter (Ninety-eight) is 'La tresflamboyant charbouble resplendissant en la fontaine de vie est figuree au precieux corps de nostre seigneur', (The very dazzling carbuncle shining in the fountain of life represents the precious body of our lord) f. 139 r. The text transforming the stone into flesh reads: 'Ceste pierre precieuse est nommee charbouble qui vault autant a dire que charbon cler a cause de la conveniencce de propriete quil a avec le bon charbon /car il est fort ardent et rouge/ et gecte sa flamme denuyt jusques aux yeulx des regardans. La vertu et relucence tant du charbon que du charbouble se peut aucunement equiparer a nostre saulveur iesuchrist. Ce fut le bon charbon esprits de fervente ardent charite qui sa chair bonne clere & blanche offrit en larbre de la croix pour la faire rouge par angoisseuse mort & vray sacrifice a son pere', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé*, f. 139 v. 'This precious stone called carbuncle which means bright coal because of the conformity of the property that it shares with burning embers because it is most fiery and red, and throws its flame in the night right into the eyes of those who watch. The virtue and lustre of the embers just like the carbuncle can be compared to our savior Jesus Christ. This was the bright ember in love with fervent burning charity which offered its good bright and white flesh on the tree of the cross to make it red by anguishing death and true sacrifice to his father'.

7 'Les principales de ces pierreries, sont les rubies ou escarboucles, dont le nom Latin et Grec, qui signifie charbon, marque la ressemblance qu'ils ont avec le feu . . .', Pliny the Elder, *Histoire Naturelle de Pline, traduites en français, avec le texte latin*, vol. 12 (Paris, Desain: 1782) 285–287.

of the incarnation. If in a painting of the incarnation, a painter can express the transformation of word into flesh through the visual representation of Christ's body, in a literary work, this is difficult: the flesh that has been transformed from the logos must still be represented in words. The writer is obligated to use the very material, language, from which the original transformation is supposed to have taken place in order to express it. In Molinet's *RRM*, this formal problem is exacerbated since its objective, which is to transform the carnal into the spiritual, is, in a very fundamental way, the opposite of the process of the incarnation, which transforms the word into the carnal. By transforming the word 'charbocle' into the 'living flesh' of Jeus Christ, Molinet can make a word flesh at the same time that he maintains the carnal to spiritual model that is crucial to the work as a whole.

Molinet extends and deepens the theological connections he has been creating by linking the *charbocle* to the eucharist.⁸ The stone (the carbuncle) is not only compared to Christ because of its resemblance to '*charbon*' and '*chair bonne*', it is also compared to the sacred communion host. Just as Jean de Meung's Genius had said that the stone in the fountain was round, Molinet explains that it is divided into three parts, and shares the mystery of the communion host. Since each part 'totally' contains the body and soul of Jesus Christ, it is of no less value than the two other parts. All of this mystery, Molinet says, is seen every day in the sacred host that the priest raises above the altar.⁹ The eucharist becomes the means by which faithful Christians can have access to the waters of the fountain.

8 On the eucharistic meaning of this scene see Frieden P. "La Rose et le Christ: lecture eucharistique du *Romant de la Rose moralisé*", in Thiry – Van Hemelryck, *La Littérature à la cour de Bourgogne* 139–51.

9 'Or est ainsi que lune dicelles parties soit grande ou petite vault autant les deux autres/ car elle contient totalement le precieux corps et lame de nostre seigneur tel comme il pendit en la croix/ & chascune des deux parties a parsoy en contient autant comme elle/ et les deux ensemble non plus que lune seule/ si nest possible a creature nee de separer le corps de lame ne le corps et lame de la deite/ n'est nul qui les peusist ensemble joindre se divizez estoit / et en contient le precieux sang du calice en espee de vin autant que la tressaincte hostie en espee de pain', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* f. 140r. 'And it is thus that one of these parts either large or small, is worth as much as the two others because it totally contains the precious body and soul of our lord as he hung on the cross. And each of the two parts in itself contains as much as the other. And the two together contain no more than one alone. It is not possible for a born creature to separate the body from the soul, nor the body and the soul from the deity no more than he could join them together if they were divided. And the precious blood of the chalice is contained in the species of the wine just as the most holy host is contained in the species of the bread'.

Once he has described the fountain and how it is the source of Christian providence, Molinet turns to the question of who has access to it. In chapter 99, the narrator glosses all those whom Nature's deacon Genius excommunicated in the *Rose* for not having followed the precepts of Nature as those who do not want to work in the fields of the Lord (ff. 140 v.–141 r.). Chapter 100 is devoted to the Virgin Mary and her son's birth and the moment of Christ's incarnation. The chapter heading says that the arrow Venus shot in the *Rose* has become the Gospel story from *Luke* 1:26, "Missus est", which explains that the angel Gabriel was sent (*missus est*) in order to announce to Mary that she would soon give birth to Jesus (f. 141 r.). In chapter 101, Molinet uses the tale of Pygmalion's statue that comes to life, which Jean de Meung took from Ovid, as a springboard to explain how Christ turned down a figure called 'Synagogue' and accepted another figure called 'Eglise' as his spouse (ff. 143 v.–144 r.).¹⁰ Saying that according to various sources Christ became joined with his Church at the moment of his incarnation, Molinet draws a highly pictorial description of the mystical marriage of Christ and Church. This description includes what is perhaps the most important iconographical element of these chapters: the opposition of Synagogue and Church (*Eglise*). The narrator describes how Jews first tried to get Jesus to marry a rather disheveled-looking woman called Synagogue before marrying the much more comely Church. And all around the wedding scene, angels and other transcendent beings are described. All of these chapters, from 99 to 101, following the model of the *Rose*, distinguish those who were able to take advantage of the fountain's life-saving waters from those who could not. Throughout these chapters, the deciding factor was interpretation. Those who understood the meaning of the Bible, especially the prophetic texts of the Old Testament, were given access to the fountain's saving grace while those who did not were rejected.

10 'La tresadmirable incarnation & nativite de Jesuchrist a este figuree par la iuste archiere bouton empenne qui embrasa le cuer de la noble pucelle/ maintenant fault il parler da [sic] mariage de nostre seigneur/ car aucuns tiennent qu'a lheure de sa deite se ioingnit a lhumanite le fianchaige en fut si comme fait', Molinet, *Roman del la Rose moralisé* f. 143 v. 'The most admirable incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ is figured by the just and mortal fletched bud that enflamed the heart of the noble maid/ now we need to talk about the marriage of our lord/ because some people hold that at the hour his divinity was joined to humanity the engagement was as if done'. For relationship of the *RRM* with the Pygmalion episode in the *Ovide moralisé*, see Croft C.M., "Pygmalion and the Metamorphosis of Meaning in Jean Molinet's *Roman de la rose moralisé*", *French Studies* 59/4 (2005) 453–66.

The Prado Fountain of Life

Another Fountain of Life from the fifteenth century might be helpful in explaining Molinet's fountain of life. A painting now called *The Fountain of Life* was made earlier in the fifteenth century and is often attributed to the studio of Jan and Hubert Van Eyck (Fig. 12.1). It is now found in the Prado in Madrid. Both text and painting are organized around a central 'fountain' in which communion wafers are prominently featured.¹¹ In both text and painting, two groups representing the Church and the Synagogue are seen in confrontation. And in both text and painting, angels and other angelic figures playing instruments are described or depicted as overseeing the confrontation between Church and Synagogue.¹² The iconographical similarities of painting and *RRM* allow a modern reader a better glimpse into some very crucial, and sometimes troubling elements of late-medieval ideas concerning identity and the relationship of Christians and Jews.

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- 11 Leslie Ann Blacksberg explains: 'In conclusion, the fountain of life in the Fountain of Life plays two roles. First it symbolizes the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, and second it divides the faithful, who believe these precious gifts of Christ's sacrifice are the means to eternal life, from the unfaithful, who are damned for their unbelief. In the religious environment of fifteenth century Spain, both Jew and Judaizer would be condemned, the former for the heresy of denying the truth of the sacraments and the latter for betraying them', Blacksberg L.M., "Between Salvation and Damnation: The Role of the Fountain in the Fountain of Life (Madrid: The Prado)", in Baert B. – Fraeters V. (eds.), *Het wellende water: de bron in tekst en beeld in de middeleeuwse Nederlanden en het Rijnland* (Leuven: 2005) 171. See also 160. Maurice B. McNamee explains: 'Another painting, called the Fountain of Life, very obviously derived in compositional detail from the Van Eyck Adoration of the Lamb itself, is equally explicit about the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine. The enthroned figure of Christ with Mary and St. John the Baptist at the top of the composition, the Lamb of God in the middle range, and the fountain in the foreground are all obvious adaptations from Van Eyck's The Adoration of the Lamb. But in the streams leading from the pedestal on which the Lamb rests and in the fountain there are hosts floating to suggest that what is received in Holy Communion is truly the body and blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine', McNamee M.B., *Vested Angels: Eucharistic Allusions in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Leuven: 1998) 106.
- 12 For the painting's iconographical references see Pereda F., "'Eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear', Literal Sense and Spiritual Vision in the Fountain of Life," in Dekoninck R. – Guideroni A. – Granjon E. (eds.), *Fiction Sacrée: Spiritualité et esthétique durant le premier âge moderne* (Leuven: 2013) 123–24; Blacksberg, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 157–73.



FIGURE 12.1 *School of Jan van Eyck, "The Fountain of Life" (1430). Oil on wood, 181 × 119 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.*

It is unlikely that Molinet actually ever saw the Prado painting in person since it was sent to Spain the 1450s. Henry IV of Castile (1425–1474) donated the panel to the El Parral monastery in Segovia around 1459.¹³ Molinet, who was born in 1435, would have been rather young to see it before it left Flanders where the Van Eycks worked. Just as importantly, there is no record of Molinet ever having travelled to Spain. It is possible, though highly unlikely, that someone might have described it to him since Molinet wrote many poems about the visits Burgundian nobles made to Spain in the 1490s, especially following the marriage of Joanna of Castile (1479–1555, daughter of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon) and Philip the Fair (1478–1506, son of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor and his first wife, Mary of Burgundy) in 1496.¹⁴ Molinet also makes detailed comments about these trips in his *Chroniques*.¹⁵ Whether Molinet actually saw the Prado painting or not is not that important since the ideas represented in the painting and the *RRM* were probably not that uncommon at the time. However, an iconographical comparison of the two works can help bring light to some issues that are crucial to understanding Molinet's moralization of the *Romance of the Rose*.

In both painting and literary text, waters of salvation flow from a fountain of life into a basin in which communion wafers play a crucial role. And in both painting and written text, characters representing Jews and Christians stand in opposition next to the fountain of life. The problem at the heart of these works is: what does it mean to understand the waters of salvation correctly? These chapters in the *RRM*, and the iconography of the painting, are part of a larger question regarding what it means to misinterpret a text, whether it is a secular text like the *Romance of the Rose* or a sacred one like the Bible. Just as Molinet chastises readers of the *Romance of the Rose* who had not been able

13 See Blacksberg, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 157.

14 See Molinet Jean, *Lettre a monseigneur l'archiduc quand il alla en espaigne* (1501); *Le Voyage d'Espagne*; (1503); *Ballade touchant le voyage d'Espagne* (1503); in *Les Faictz et dictz de Jean Molinet*, ed. N. Dupire, vol. 1 (Paris: 1936) 371–72, 373–80, 381–82. Jean Devaux in his review of the manuscript of this article considers it highly unlikely that Molinet ever saw the painting or had it described to him.

15 Molinet describes the city of Toledo, for example, as a very dirty and dangerous place during the trip the archduke and his wife made to Spain: 'Monseigneur l'archiduc et madame se tenoyent le plus à Toulette, ville fort puante, infecte et dangereuse our gens delicatifz, à cause des rues fort estroites et non pavées; et ce procède des putrefactions des charoignes qui engendrent le malvais aer; pour quoy jouvenceaulx de par dechà estoient facilement infectéz, maladiex et expiréz, comme . . . Divion, frère du pruvost d'Arras et aultres de pareille sorte', *Chroniques de Jean Molinet*, eds. G. Doutrepoint – O. Jodogne, vol. 2 (Brussels: 1935) 517.

to understand its allegorical meaning, these chapters also chastise those who had not been able to read the allegorical meaning of the Bible. The issue of correct interpretation runs through these chapters like the waters that flow through the fountain of life. A comparison of Molinet's Fountain of Life with the painted version can help bring the meaning of these chapters to light.

According to the Dutch art historian J. Bruyn, writing in 1957, the painting was made in the 1450s. The emphasis on the Sacrament of the Host commemorated, he said, an alleged Host profanation that occurred in Segovia in 1455.¹⁶ Bruyn also hypothesized that the painting's depiction of Jews and Christians illustrated the anti-Semitism that had been growing in Castile in the fifteenth century. He explained that its iconography had been imposed by one of the king's preachers, Alphonso de Espina, who wrote one of the foundational texts of the inquisition, the *Fortalitium fidei contra Judeos, Sarracenos, aliosque christiane fidei inimicos* (1458–64). Recent critics have pointed out inconsistencies in Bruyn's thesis. Felipe Pereda writes that a recent dendrochronological (tree-ring growth) study has suggested that it was most likely painted in the 1420s or 30s.¹⁷ Leslie Ann Blacksberg explains furthermore that the Madrid panel does not follow the narrative conventions that make up host desecration scenes that would correspond to the Host desecration in Segovia in 1455.¹⁸ However, even if the Madrid panel does not depict the host profanation scene as suggested by Bruyn, it does, as Blacksberg asserts, bear witness to the sorts of anti-Jewish beliefs found in Espina's *Fortress of Faith*.¹⁹

Interpretation in the Fountain of Life

Whether Espina's *Fortress of Faith* can be understood as having had an influence on the Prado *Fountain of Life* or not, this text can help shed light on how contemporaries might have understood basic problems concerning interpretation of the Old Testament. Espina returns time and again to the prophetic texts

16 See Pereda, "Eyes that they should not see" 117. See Bruyn J., *Van Eyck Problemen (De Levensbron-Het werk van een leerling van Jan Van Eyck)* (Utrecht: 1957). See Pereda, "Eyes that they should not see" note 7, 117–118 on dating of Espina's text and the Prado Fountain of Life.

17 See Pereda, "Eyes that they should not see" 120. Although dendrochronological testing shows that the panels date from the 1420s or 1430s, it could be that the wood panels on which the painting was made were used later. Thanks to Alice Jarrard for this insight.

18 Blacksberg, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 171.

19 Blacksberg, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 171.

of Isaiah to help talk about the problem of reading the Old Testament. He says, for example, that an important moment in the Old Testament regarding the incarnation of Christ was hidden in figures of speech, as when Isaiah says that a virgin would conceive, and would bear, a son.²⁰ Time and again, Espina comes back to Isaiah in his explanation of why the Jews were cursed unto the current time. Referring to *Isaiah* 6, he says that Jews hear and see, but do not understand and do not learn.²¹ Espina explains, citing text from *John* 12:40, which refers to *Isaiah* 6:10, that for the most part Jews were not open to the preaching of Christ, and implies that they were not capable of understanding the true meaning of the texts in the Hebrew Bible that referred allegorically to Jesus Christ.²² It was because of their refusal to see this truth that they were cursed and oppressed until the present day.²³ And he returns repeatedly to Isaiah to show how the truth of the Christian Bible was in the Hebrew Bible, and often

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- 20 'De prefiguratione dominice incarnationis. Articulus dominice incarnationis in veteri testamento sub figurarum involucris fuit. de quo dicit Esa. Ecce virgo concipiet & propiet filium et cetera. Esa. vii. 'Espina Alphonso de, *Fortalitium fidei contra judeos: sarracenos: aliosque christiane fidei inimicos*, Johannes de Romoys for Stephanus Gueynart (Lyon: 1511) f. 26 r. See *Isaiah* 7:14: 'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel'. Steven J. McMichael explains: 'Isaiah contains, therefore, many Christian proof texts which, in the mind of Alphonso, clearly demonstrated to anyone who properly reads them that Jesus was the promised Messiah', McMichael S.J., *Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah?: Alphonso de Espina's Argument Against the Jews in the Fortalitium Fidei* (c. 1464), (Atlanta: 1994) xvii. See chapter 5, "Commentary on Alphonso's de Espina's Use of Isaiah for the Messiahship of Jesus: A Selection of Texts", (173–295) in McMichael for the extent of Espina's use of Isaiah. See also Vidal Doval R., *Misera Hispania: Jews and Conversos in Alonso de Espina's Fortalitium fidei* (Oxford: 2013) and Netanyahu B., "Alonso de Espina – Was He a New Christian", in *Proceedings for Jewish Research*, vo. XLIII (1976): 107–65. Netanyahu shows convincingly that Espina was not a *converso* as had been suggested by some earlier critics.
- 21 'Et iterum Esaie. vi. Audite audientes et nolite intelligere & videte visionem & nolite agnoscere quasi dicat auditis et non intelligitis videtis & non cognoscitis', Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* cvii. r. See *Isaiah* 6:9: 'And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not'. On blindness in Espina see Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania* 98–99.
- 22 'Et hoc fuit impletum quoniam ad predicationem Christi judei pro magna parte fuerunt obdurati secundum quod dicitur expresse Ioannis xii. propterea non poterant credere quia dixit Esaias excavavit oculos eorum & induravit cor eorum', Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* cvii v. On allegory in Espina, see Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania* 68–72.
- 23 'In qua execratione ac etiam durtia usque in presens tempus perduret generatio ista', Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* 107 v.

to the same passage that prophesied that a virgin would give birth and bear a son call Emmanuel.²⁴

The same sort of relationship between biblical meaning and salvation is also found in another text from the mid-fifteenth century that has sometimes been interpreted by modern critics as being an influence on the Prado *Fountain of Life*. Juan de Torquemada's *Summa de ecclesia* (1453?) offered a resounding critique of the horizontal understanding of ecclesiastical hierarchy professed at the Councils of Constance and Basel.²⁵ Torquemada also refers to Old Testament texts such as Isaiah as well as to the *Song of Songs*. In a chapter entitled "On the reasons why the Holy Church must be called a vineyard of God, a garden, a fountain, a well of living water", Torquemada says that the church can also be called a sealed fountain in the same way that the beloved is described in *Canticle 4* (*Song of Songs* 4:12).²⁶ The church is like a fountain since it abounds in doctrine that waters those surrounding it. And it can be said to be a sealed fountain since its spiritual meaning is hidden from the unworthy and is disturbed by no assault. Perhaps most importantly, he comes back to Isaiah, citing from chapter 58:11 (the text says 56 but it is clear that he is actually referring to 58:11): 'and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not' (see *Bible* 1152). He winds up his metaphorical explanation by explaining that the church can said to be a fountain since many of the healthful waters from it overflow onto the well-being of the faithful. It is finally a well of life-giving waters (*puteus aquarum viventium*).²⁷ Torquemada's *Summa* explains how the fountain both provides life-giving waters to the worthy and hides it from the unworthy.

There is no need to think that Molinet had these texts in mind when he was writing the *RRM*. These texts by Espina or Torquemada simply offer

24 'Sed quam hoc satis est notum fidelibus immo sanctitatem eius [of the Virgin Mary] per scripturas iudeorum & sarracenorum declarare propono. Circa primum dicitur Isa. vii cito. Ecce virgo concipiet & pariet filium & vocabitur nomen eius emanuel: quam auctoritas ad litteram de Christo & de eius matre', Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* 146 r.

25 Torquemada Juan de, *Summa de ecclesia contra impugnatores potestatis summi pontificis* (Rome, Eucharius Silber: 1489) chapter 32, no pagination.

26 'De rationibus propter quas ecclesia sancta dei Vineia dicta sit: et Ortus: Fons: Puteus aquarum viventium'. [...] 'Consequenter ecclesia legitime etiam fons nominata. unde cant. iiii. dicitur fons signatus. & hoc duplici ratione. Primo propter abundantiam irrigantis doctrine, unde glossa cant. iiii. ecclesia fons dicitur: quia doctrina abundat. unde proximas irrigat. Et signatus fons dicitur: quia spiritualis sensus indignis absconditur & nulla incursione turbatur. Isa. lvi. Eris quasi hortus inriguus & sicut fons aquarum cuius non deficient aque', Torquemada, *Summa de ecclesia*, chapter 32, no pagination.

27 Torquemada, *Summa de ecclesia*, chapter 32, no pagination.

examples of how other writers in the fifteenth century thought about some of the issues at stake in the Fountain of Life chapters. What is important here is how these authors approach the question of interpretation. As in these other texts, Molinet refers to passages from Isaiah to illustrate the meaning of his fountain of life.²⁸ For example, in his first allusion to the fountain of life, in chapter 97, as a source of Christian salvation, Molinet refers to the *Psalms* and to *Isaiah*. He begins by explaining, in an obvious allusion to *Psalms* 42, that just as deer desire the water of a fountain, the reasonable soul also craves the sight of his creator.²⁹ He then goes on to say, in an explicit reference to *Isaiah* 55:1, 'It is the revivifying water where each person can see the water about which it is written: "Everyone that is thirsty come to my waters"' (*Cest leaue vivificative ou chascun se doit bien mirer celle dont il est escrit. "Sicientes venite ad aquas"*, f. 139 r.).³⁰ The problem in these chapters, as in the Prado painting, and in Espina and Torquemada, is interpretation. Those who would be able to slake their thirst in the revivifying waters were those who correctly understood the prophetic nature of *Isaiah*. Those who did not correctly interpret those texts would remain thirsty.

What is at stake, ultimately, in Molinet's fountain of life is not only those who desire to drink from it, but also those who do not. Just as Genius excommunicated all those who did not want to follow Nature's commandments in Jean de Meung's *Rose*, Molinet's *RRM* will reject all those who are not drawn to Christian salvation.³¹ Molinet peppers his texts with allusions to these

28 It is interesting that Molinet does not seem to have used any of the same passages from *Isaiah* that Espina in these chapters devoted to the fountain of life. For a list of passages cited by Espina, see McMichael, "Was Jesus" 293–95.

29 See *Psalms* 42:1: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God'.

30 See *Isaiah* 55:1: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters'.

31 Molinet seems to be referring to the same vein of critical interpretation found in *Revelation* which clearly delineates the relationship between those excluded from the waters of salvation and those who will be saved by them. *Revelation* 22:15, for example, explains that outside the city of God 'are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie'. In verse 22:17, after Jesus says that he is the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star, the text says: 'And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely'. In Molinet, as in *Revelation*, the text opposes those that thirst after salvation to those who do not. Those who do not are like dogs and sorcerers, and should be excluded. Blacksberg underlines how both the Prado Fountain of Life panel and the Ghent Altarpiece of the Holy Lamb, which was painted by Jan Van Eyck, share a mutual reference to *Revelation* 22, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 159.

prophetic texts, using the same sort of 'us' and 'them' typology. Those who drink of the fountain's life-giving waters are those who 'correctly' interpret Biblical texts. Those who do not know how to read these texts 'correctly' are excluded from the fountain's grace. Just as those excluded from the life-saving waters of the Fountain of Life in the *Romance of the Rose* did not understand Nature's teaching, those excluded from the life-saving waters of the Fountain of Life in the *Roman de la rose moralisé* did not understand the prophetic meaning of the Bible. They might come to the fountain of life, but they could not drink from it since they had not understood correctly the meaning of Biblical texts like those from Isaiah.

The incarnation is virtually at the heart of Molinet's Fountain of Life, in the stone that is transformed into the body of Jesus Christ. As already mentioned, the word *charboucle* is transformed first into *charbon clair*, 'bright embers', and then into the *chair bonne* or 'good flesh' of Jesus Christ. Molinet then pushes this paranomasic development by what seems a further reference to Pliny's *Natural History*. He says that just as the carbuncle has the property of going out when it is among embers (*charbon*), and then coming to life when it is dampened, so too Jesus Christ was thrown among Jews and other '*faulx tyrans charbons du dyable*' who 'put out' (*estaindirent*) his body by hard suffering before he was brought back to life by the tears of his mother and Mary Magdalen.³² Pliny's description of anthracite, which is part of his larger treatment of rubies, would seem to be the source for this development of the stone's incarnation as the flesh of Jesus Christ. Pliny's *Natural History*, in a French translation, explains that the anthracite, which resembles a burning coal (*charbon ardent*) has the particularity of dying out (*s'amortir*), and losing its splendor when thrown in the fire, but when put in water becomes dazzling (*flamboyant*).³³ The connection among Christ's incarnation, his crucifixion, and his resurrections is paralleled by the stone's story: from inanimate stone to living flesh, to crucified and,

32 'Ainsi en advint au iour de la passion de nostre createur luy plus resplendissant que nulle pierre fut boute en la fournaise dyre et denvie entre juifs & faulx tyrans charbons du dyable & gros tysons denfer qui luy estaindirent son corps par dure souffrance/ mais quant ce vint ce mesme iour au soir il fut arrouse de larmes doeil & essuye de gros sous-pirs tand de sa glorieuse mere comme de la magdalene & autres dames prenans compassion et pitie de sa mort', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* ff. 139 v.-140 r.

33 'On trouve dans Thesprotie (Greek Province) une pierrerie fossile appellée *anthracite*, qui ressemble à un charbon ardent. [...] On dit qu'il ya des anthracites qui sont environnées d'une veine blanche; elles sont de couleur de feu, comme les rubis. Elles ont cela de particulier, qu'étant jettées dans le feu, elles s'amortissent, pour ainsi dire, & perdent tout leur éclat; & qu'au contraire, étant arrosées d'eau, elles deviennent flamboyantes', Pliny vol. 12: 309-311.

finally, resurrected body. If a reader understands this story correctly, he or she is capable of enjoying the life-saving waters of the fountain of life.

The allusions to the “charbon ardent” allow Molinet to tap into a deep vein of prophetic theology in this passage. Throughout early Christianity, and in the Middle Ages, the coal that is mentioned in Isaiah 6:6–7 was taken as a prefiguration of Christ. In Isaiah, a seraph lays live coal on the prophet’s mouth saying: ‘Lo this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged’. Later interpreters took this as a prefiguration of Christ’s coming and as a symbol of Christ’s dual nature.³⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, for example, refers to the coal in Isaiah to describe Christ’s incarnate nature.³⁵ He says that just as coal is wood by nature, when it is filled with fire, it contains fire’s power. Citing from the Gospel (‘for the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’, *John* 1:14), Cyril says that Jesus needed to be understood in the same way. Even if he had the form of a human being, his divine nature remained within him. By converting the *charboucle* in the *Rose* to the *charbon ardent* and then to the *chair bonne* of Jesus Christ, Molinet effectively connects the question of Christ’s divinity to the prophetic tradition. These are central issues throughout these chapters. Not only is it necessary to understand and accept Christ’s divinity, it is also necessary to recognize it in the prophetic texts of the Bible. For Molinet, the problem was that not everyone was able to see this spiritual truth and remained locked in the literal level of meaning, and thus was refused access to the fountain of life.

The question of Christ’s hypostatic nature is a constant presence in these chapters. Molinet alludes to it in his gloss of the stone in the basin as the body of Jesus Christ. Molinet continues his moralization by linking the mystery of the stones to that of the eucharist that the priest performs at the altar (f. 140 r.) He says that the communion wafer, which is like the stone in the basin, totally contains the body and soul of Christ.³⁶ This would seem an allusion to the doctrine of ‘*totus christus*’. The communion wafer contains, he says, ‘*totalement le précieux corps et lame de nostre seigneur*’. The presence of Christ’s body is really,

34 See *Isaiah Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, ed. and trans. Wilken R.L., with Christman A.R. – Hollerich M.J. (Grand Rapids, MI: 2007) 82–84. See also Berthier G.F., *Isiae traduit en françois, avec des notes des réflexions*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1808) 239–42; Granicola J., *Les Anciennes Liturgies; ou la manière dont on dit la Sainte Messe dans les Eglises d'Orient & dans celles d'Occident* (Paris, Jean de Nully: 1704) 106–07.

35 Wilken, *Isaiah Interpreted* 82–83.

36 See footnote 8. Also Frieden, “Le Rose et le Christ”, 148.

truly, and substantially contained in the communion wafer.³⁷ Since the sacrament of communion contains ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, “*the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.*”’ As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, this presence is called ‘real’, meaning ‘a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present’. Molinet, like many Christian thinkers, connects the Christ’s incarnate body to the eucharist.³⁸ The sacrament of communion becomes a means of attaining the salvation of the waters of the fountain of life.

The question of correct interpretation is brought to its most powerful point at the end of this chapter. Molinet ends this chapter about the stone’s transformation into the body of Christ and into communion wafers with a citation from the Book of Isaiah. He says that faithful Christians could ‘taste from the fountain of life by taking communion which will bring you great joy’.³⁹ He then ends with a quote from Isaiah: ‘*Quia haurietis aquas de fontibus salvatoris*’ (Therefore shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation). This citation, from Isaiah 12:3, is key for understanding how the Fountain of Life in the *RRM*

37 See: ‘The mode of Christ’s presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend”. In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*”. This presence is called “real” — by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be “real” too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present’, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Geoffrey Chapman (London: 1999) 309. The *Catechism* italicizes the words taken from the Council of Trent (1561). It quotes from *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, eds. H. Denzinger – A. Schönmetzer (Barcelona, 1967) 389.

38 Pope Leo XIII writes in his encyclical *Mirae Caritatis* (1902): ‘The Eucharist, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, should be regarded as in a manner a continuation and extension of the Incarnation. For in and by it the substance of the Incarnate Word is united with individual men, and the supreme Sacrifice offered on Calvary is in a wondrous manner renewed . . . all laws of nature are suspended; the whole substance of the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ’, *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: 1903) 524.

39 ‘Et pourtant vous humains viateurs de peregrines en ce val miserable prenez vive refec-tion du saint sacrament de lautel affin que puissez trouver lassus & mirer vostre face au tresrustillant et refulgent charboucle/ & goutez de la fontaine vive par laquelle de toute joye aurez lamas. La serez repeuz & nourris. Quia haurietis aquas de fontibus salvatoris’, Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* f. 140 r.

functions. Throughout early Christianity and the Middle Ages, commentators explained that this passage was actually referring to Christian teachings. Jerome said that the springs of the savior were evangelical teachings.⁴⁰ Irenaeus of Lyon said that it was actually about Christ's incarnation, while Gregory of Nyssa tied it to the verse from *Revelation* (22:17), already mentioned, concerning Christ's message to those who thirsted to come and drink.⁴¹ Gregory also saw it as a prophetic warning against those who are worthy of punishment for not having heard the Word.⁴²

Rabanus Maurus, the eighth-century Biblical commentator whom Molinet mentions as a source in his prologue to the *RRM*, says that the passage Molinet cites from Isaiah is actually exhorting, via figures of speech (*sub figura*), those who believe in God, and who have been given faith, to take care to learn his doctrine earnestly.⁴³ He underlined the break between literal and spiritual interpretation when he wrote that the waters that the faithful will draw are not from the Nile or the Euphrates but are the waters of Christ.⁴⁴ Rabanus Maurus also connects this passage from Isaiah to passages from the *Gospel of John*, such as 7:37–38, in which the evangelist quotes Jesus: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water', and 4:14, where Christ is quoted saying: 'Whosoever will drink from the water that I will give them will not be thirsty in eternity but will become in that water of health in eternal life'. He goes on to say that we should understand these fountains of the Savior as being evangelical doctrine.⁴⁵

The allusion to Isaiah at the end of chapter 99 places Molinet's Fountain of Life in the same hermeneutic tradition as that in which Rabanus Maurus and

40 Jerome, "Commentary on Isaiah" 12:1–5, in Wilken, *Isaiah, Interpreted* 155–56. See also Smith G.V., *The New American Commentary*, vol. 15A, *Isaiah 1–39* (Nashville: 2007) 279, 282.

41 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.10.3, in Wilken, *Isaiah Interpreted* 157.

42 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 19, in Wilken, *Isaiah Interpreted* 157.

43 'Post hæc Propheta sub figura exhortatur eos qui credunt in Deum, ut ejus doctrinam intente discere studeant, qui ejus sortiti sunt et fidem, et dicit: "Haurietis aquas in gaudio de fontibus Salvatoris," Maurus Rabanus, "Commentaria in cantica quæ ad matutinas laudes dicuntur", in Migne J.-P. (ed.) *B. Rabani Mauri fuldensis abbatis et moguntini archiepiscopi opera omnia*, vol. 6 (Paris: 1852) 1092.

44 Rabanus talks about the waters of the rivers of Egypt and of Rasni, *Commentaria* 1092–93. The river of Rasni, who was the king of Assyria in 8th century BCE, is the Euphrates. Jerome, in his "Commentary on Isaiah", also refers to the Nile and the Euphrates in this way. Both Jerome and Rabanus seem to refer to Isaiah 8:5–8. See Wilken, *Isaiah Interpreted* 155.

45 Rabanus, "Commentaria" 1093.

the other Christian commentators worked. It is necessary to understand the true meaning of the waters in the fountain. This meant recognizing that they were not simply literal waters but were spiritual waters. Those who would be saved are those who understood this. In the following chapter Molinet reinforces this point. He explains that it is not enough to understand literally, and with no allegorical meaning, the Perilous Fountain in which Narcissus died as a means of discouraging vain and egotistical people from throwing themselves into the dark and damnable abyss (f. 140 v.). It is necessary to go beyond that reading and see the real meaning of the Fountain of Life with its life-giving *charboucles*. This meant that it was necessary to recognize the divinity of Christ. Those who did not deign to labor in the fields of 'our lord' would be excommunicated (f. 140 v.). The connection between effective reading and salvation is clear. It is only by recognizing the spiritual and prophetic nature of the waters Isaiah mentions that salvation is possible. Those who did not know how to read correctly would necessarily be excluded from God's saving grace.

The Incarnation and the Mystical Marriage of Christ and Church

Chapter 101 connects all the dots that constitute the Fountain of Life chapters. This chapter moralizes the story of Pygmalion and his statue that comes to life, also as a means of commenting on the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the *Romance of the Rose*, Jean de Meung had taken the story of Pygmalion from Ovid as a means of showing the power of love. Molinet explains that the very admirable incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ are symbolized by the 'just and mortal fletched bud' (*iuste archiere bouton empenne*), which burned the maiden's heart so that she might be transformed from stone into flesh.⁴⁶ Molinet then explains that it is necessary to talk about the marriage of our lord since Christ was sometimes said to have been married to his church at the moment of his incarnation. Augustine, in his homily on the *Epistle of John the Evangelist to the Parthians*, develops this idea as part of the concept of *totus christus* already mentioned.⁴⁷ Augustine explains that the Bridegroom's chamber

46 See footnote 9.

47 '... and that Bridegroom's chamber was the Virgin's womb, because in that virginal womb were joined the two, the Bridegroom and the bride, the Bridegroom and the Word, and the bride the flesh; because it is written, And they shall be one flesh; and the Lord saith in the Gospel, Therefore they are no more twain but one flesh', Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John, and his first Epistle, by St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, vol. 11, trans. H. Browne (Oxford: 1849) 1096. The concept of *totus Christus* was important

was the Virgin's womb, because in that virginal womb were joined the two, the Bridegroom and the Word, the bride and the flesh. It was because of this mystical marriage that the whole Christ (the *totus Christus*) comes into being. For Augustine, the head is the only begotten Son of God and the body is his Church, bridegroom and wife, two in one body.

This mystical marriage of Christ and his church brings the distinction between those who are included and those who are excluded from the fountain of life-giving waters into tight focus. Molinet's earlier chapters dealing with the Fountain of Life had described the distinction between those included and those excluded from the park of the good shepherd in fairly allusive terms: there were those who recognized the Christian nature of Isaiah's prophecies and those who did not. Now, Molinet becomes much more specific about those who are and who are not included in the park of the good shepherd: those who are included are Christians and those who are not are Jews. Molinet seems very close to Augustine who, in the homily on the Epistle of St. John the Evangelist in which he describes the mystical marriage of Christ and church as happening at the time of the incarnation, says very clearly that Isaiah was talking about Jesus Christ when he prophesied in his canticles.⁴⁸ Jews, who did not see what Augustine saw in Isaiah, would not be able to taste of the waters of the fountain of life.

Although it is not necessary to connect the opposition of synagogue and church in the *RRM* to any one text or painting since it was a fairly common motif in the Middle Ages, Molinet's *RRM* and the Prado panel raise the question of the context of the Fountain of Life.⁴⁹ As in the Prado painting, Molinet's description of the mystical marriage of Christ and his church opposes the Synagogue and the Church. Molinet begins by saying that certain 'Jews of rough understanding' (*juifs de rude entendement*) tried to get Jesus to marry an

for Aquinas who connected it directly to Christ's incarnation. Paul Gondreau explains: 'For Aquinas, this means Christ's humanity is safeguarded and understood only when seen in direct relation to the whole of the mystery of the Incarnation, the *totus Christus*', "Anti-Docetism in Aquinas's *Super Ioannem*: St. Thomas as Defender of the Full Humanity of Christ", in Dauphinais M. – Levering M. (eds.) *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, DC: 2005) 262.

48 'And Esaias minds right well that they are two: for speaking in the person of Christ he saith, He hath set a mitre upon Me as upon a Bridegroom, and adorned me with an ornament as a Bride', Augustine, *Homilies on The Gospel According to St. John* 1096. Augustine refers to Isaiah 61:10.

49 Sara Lipton describes how the character *Synagoga* is depicted in highly negative terms in the 13th-century *Bible moralisée*. See *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisée* (Berkeley: 1999) 24–25.

'old foolish and driveling matron called Synagogue' (*sotte matrone fort vieille radottee nommee Synagogue*, f. 143 v.).⁵⁰ Since this did not work, he married a 'gracious and most prudent lady whom he knew called Church' (*gracieuse dame fort prudente et de sa congnation nommee leglise*) who was 'as beautiful as Rachel and humble as Esther' (*belle comme rachel humble comme hester*).⁵¹ As was the case in the painting, the two basic elements in this description are the Church and the Synagogue.

The rest of the description of this mystical marriage also bears strong formal similarities with the painting. Molinet explains that just as the statue produced by Pygmalion in the *Rose* was given a golden crown adorned with stones, so too 'the pope is also very richly crowned and adorned with precious stones which are glossed as the cardinal virtues' (*le chief de liglise nostre saint pere le pape est tresrichement couronne et aorne de pierres precieuse equarres qui sont cardinales vertues*). Although the details of the portrayal of the pope are not identical in the *RRM* and the Prado Fountain of Life, the overall effect is similar. In both, the Church is depicted as being headed by a richly arrayed pope who is opposed to a less vigorous Synagogue. The various parts of his dress, which are given spiritual meaning, are also similar to the details found in the painting. Molinet explains, for example, that 'the two golden brooches on his collar are the two powerful rich and strong swords which support him with vigor' and 'the two golden pieces of cloth (*verges*) that droop from his ears are the ring of marriage and the seal of confession'.⁵² 'The resplendent brooch on his chest is to warn the ministers of his church that they must be the mirror to others of how to live correctly'.⁵³ And finally, the description in the *RRM* also features people singing and playing instruments. The flowers and songs Pygmalion had

50 Molinet's depiction of the Synagogue as 'foolish and driveling' is also consistent with the sort of contrast found in Torquemada's *Summa de ecclesia*. Torquemada says that the 'synagogue' is associated with the term 'gathering' or *congregatio* and irrational creatures, while the 'church' is associated with the term 'assembly' or *convocatio* and with rational creatures. See Torquemada, *Fortalitium fidei*, chapter 1, no pagination.

51 Lipton explains that identifying Rachel with the Holy Church and Lea with Synagoga was entirely standard. Rachel, who was Jacob's new wife, was understood as replacing his old one, Lea, who represented the Old Law. See Lipton, *Images of Intolerance* 59.

52 'Les deux fermaillees ou fermans dor qui luy sont mis au col sont les deux puissantes riches & fortes glaives/ tant de ladict eglise que du bras seculier qui le soubtiennent en vigueur & deffendant/ les deux verges dor qui luy pendent aux aureilles sont l'anel de mariage & le seel de confession', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* ff. 143 v.–144r.

53 'La tresresplendissant afficque devant sa poictrine donne advertance que les ministres de leglise doyvent estre miroir aux autres de bien vivre...', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* f. 144 r.

given his statue are transformed into 'the gentle harmonies of human voices, organs, and bells, and offer him rosaries of fifty our fathers'.⁵⁴

The depiction of the opposition of Synagogue and Church in chapter 101 of the *RRM* is not exactly the same as the scene depicted in the Fountain of Life in the Prado. However, there are enough elements in common, especially if this chapter is read as having a formal relationship with the Fountain of Life depicted in chapter 98, to understand the literary image in the *RRM* as functioning in a similar way to how the painted image functions. In both, symbolic figures representing the Christian church and the Jewish synagogue are opposed, while a fountain of life offers eternal life through eucharistic wafers. And more generally, the figures in the *RRM* are given meaning by the allusions throughout these chapters to the question of interpretation. The problem at stake here is how to understand the Fountain of Life: those who understand its real meaning can enjoy everlasting life, while those who do not are cut off from its life-saving waters.

The question remains as to how to understand the opposition of Church and Synagogue depicted in the *RRM*. In Molinet, it is clear that the church triumphs over the synagogue. Jesus chooses the gracious and prudent church rather than the old, foolish, and driveling synagogue as his mystical spouse. However, it is also true that Molinet leaves open a way for the Jews to save themselves, however small it might be. He explains that some Jews had managed to be included in the marriage of Christ and Church, saying that certain Jews, touched by 'good spirit' had abandoned the 'old synagogue' in order to participate at the mystical marriage of Jesus Christ and his church.⁵⁵ He explains the rejection of the '*vielle synagogue*' in light of the Apostle Paul's epistles to the Hebrews,

54 'Pymalion pour complaire a son ymage luy presentoit chapelet de flourettes & chantoit melodieux rondeaulx au son de divers instrumens/ ainsi que maintenant nous oyons en leglise les doulces armonyés dhumaines voix/dorgues & de clochettes/ et luy offrons chapeletz de cinquante patenostres', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* f. 144 r.

55 'Et ainsi que Pymalion espousa lymage dyvoire a tresgrant liesse de cuer & sentraymerent comme deux coulombeaulx/ pareillement nostre seigneur iesus voulut espouser leglise militant. Et pour estra a la solennite des nopces aucuns juifs touchiez de bon esperit habandonnerent leur vieille synagogue pour accompagner le glorieux espoux. Et dautre part saint pol apostre envoya ses epistoles aux ebrieux/ aux romains/ aux corinthois/ aux gallatees/ & en divers quartiers du monde. Et qui plus est appella par sa tresdoulce eloquence les gentilz hommes des loingtains pays foulans aux pieds leur faulse idolatrye. Et en presence diceulx fut ce Noble mariage acomply. Et adonc le glorieux espoux regardant par admiracion la grant beaulte de sa tres digne espouse se print a dire. Tota pulchra es amica mea colum tuum ut columpna velut turris eburnea', Molinet, *Roman de la rose moralisé* f. 144 r.

the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Galatians. Molinet says that Paul's eloquence called on non-Christians (*gentilz hommes*), from the furthest countries, to knock down their false idols. Molinet brings this chapter to a close by saying that the noble marriage of Christ and his church was carried out in the presence of these Jews and Gentiles. Just as St. Paul explains in his letter to the Galatians (3:28), the *RRM* suggests that the Jews could become as one with Christians.⁵⁶ All that is needed for the Jews, Gentiles, and others excluded from the Fountain of Life is to recognize that the fountain waters mentioned in *Isaiah* were the same as those in *John*. If they could only recognize that the last lines of the chapter, taken from the *Song of Songs* (*Tota pulchra es amica mea colum tuum ut columna velut turris eburnea*) actually referred to the Christian church they would also be included in the mystical marriage of Christ and Church.⁵⁷ If they could do this then they would have corrected the sin they had committed in not seeing the true meaning of *Isaiah* and the other prophets.

Do these last lines from chapter 101 actually point to a way to reconcile church and synagogue? It has been suggested that the Prado Fountain of Life does just that. Felipe Pereda explains that the image does not counter-pose two irreconcilable realities but shows a way toward reconciliation.⁵⁸ In the same way, it could be that these last lines referring to Jews who had been moved by the 'good spirit', and had abandoned the synagogue, might represent a means of overcoming the opposition of synagogue and church. If this is true, it would mean that only the Jews who chose to abandon the synagogue and follow Jesus Christ could be part of the mystical marriage. However, would this not mean that they would no longer be Jews? Even more, the sad reality of the *Conversos* under the Inquisition in Spain offers all-too striking proof of just how difficult such a conversion would be.⁵⁹ Although it might be the case that the Prado Fountain of Life represents a means of reconciling the Synagogue and the Church, the depiction of these two figures in the *RRM* would seem to

56 See Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ'.

57 As Pereda explains: 'Authors such as Honorius Augustodunensis used nuptial language to discover the metaphor of the reconciliation of Church and Synagogue, both converted to the love of their spouse (Christ)', "Eyes that they should not see" 141.

58 'The image does not counterpose two irreconcilable realities; rather, it shows a way—which, it is important to remember, runs in just one direction—toward reconciliation', Pereda, "Eyes that they should not see" 150.

59 On plight of *Conversos* in Spain during late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478–1614: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and trans. L.A. Homza (Indianapolis: 2006) 1–79; Gil J., *Los Conversos y la inquisición sevillana*, vol. 1, (Sevilla: 2000); Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*.

remain oppositional. The relationship of Synagogue and Church in the *RRM* might be closer to that described by Sarah Lipton in her analysis of the *Bible moralisée*.⁶⁰ Lipton remarks on the fluid nature of Jewish and Christian identities in the Middle Ages, explaining that Jews were asked to convert and yet repudiated when they did. The Jews might have been essential to Christianity, as Augustine stated in the *City of God* (XVIII. 46), since they were proof that Christ was the fulfillment of the promise made to Israelites, but the question of what to do with the Jews themselves still remained.⁶¹ If Jewish prophetic texts like Isaiah were essential in Christian thought in the Middle Ages, there was little room for actual Jews.⁶²

Molinet's poems and *Chroniques*, especially around the time he was writing the *RRM*, bear eloquent witness to the very difficult and often painful relationship of Jews and Christians in the late Middle Ages. The Spanish royal house came to play an increasingly important role in Burgundian politics following the marriage of Joanna of Castile, the daughter of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, and Philip the Fair, the son of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor and his first wife, Mary of Burgundy, in 1496. Molinet makes a few generally approving allusions to Isabella and Ferdinand's persecution of Jews. An entry from 1505 in the *Chroniques* praises Isabella of Castille, just after her death in November 1504, for having burned to death Jews who through their 'insolent opinion' (*proterve opinion*) 'despise the law of our creator' (*dispi-toyent la loy de notre createur*).⁶³ And in an *Epitaphe to Dame Isabeau* from the same year he praises her for having 'lit great fires' (*fist allumer granz fus*)

60 Sarah Lipton's remarks about the nature of Jewish and Christian identities in the context of the thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* are equally valid in the context of the *Roman de la rose moralisée*. Lipton explains: 'Fluidity between Judaism and Christianity is thus simultaneously courted (in calls for conversion) and repudiated (in condemnations of "Judaizing"), acknowledged and denied. In order, then, to answer the question posed at the beginning of this book—Why so many Jews? And why so anti-Jewish?—it also necessary to ask, What is a Jew? And what is a Christian?', *Images of Intolerance* 29.

61 "Therefore, when they [the Jews] do not believe in our Scriptures, their own Scriptures, to which they are blind when they read, are fulfilled in them. Unless indeed any one says that the Christians forged the prophecies about Christ that are quoted under the name of a Sibyl or of others, if there be any, which have no connection with the Jewish people', Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, vol. VI, trans. W.C. Greene, (Cambridge, MA: 1960) 49–50. See Pereda, "Eyes that they should not see" 126.

62 See Seiferth W. *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature*, trans. L. Chadeayne – P. Gottewald (New York: 1970) 20, quoted by Blacksberg, "Between Salvation and Damnation" 162.

63 Molinet J. *Chroniques*, vol. II, 543.

with the bodies of the Jews.⁶⁴ And yet his poetry from the same period is filled with allusions to symbols from the Jewish Bible like the Torah scrolls he uses to extol the birth of Isabella's grandson Charles in *La Tres Desiree Et Prouffitable Naissance de Charles d'Autrice* (1500).⁶⁵ Jewish symbols, correctly interpreted through Christian Gospels, might be necessary, but Jews, especially those who did not know how to read these symbols via Christianity, were less so.

The incarnation plays a small but key role in the Fountain of Life chapters in the *RRM*. It is not only central to questions about the sacrament of the Eucharist and the relations of Jews and Christians, it also plays a key role in the exegetical problem at the heart of the *RRM*. The main problem in the *RRM*, as Molinet points out in the prologue, is one of reading. For Molinet, the *Romance of the Rose* was not the secular and profane text that some readers thought it was. It was really a highly spiritual and moral tale that just needed to be read in the correct way. For Molinet, this meant understanding that it was actually about the divinity of Christ. A correct reading of the text would show that those who did not understand the true meaning of the *Rose* were guilty of the same sort of interpretative mistake made by those who did not recognize the true meaning of the Bible. In both cases, the failure to see and understand meaning led to blindness and abandonment. In the Prado Fountain of Life, this interpretative failure is symbolized in the figure representing Synagogue. Synagogue turns away from the Fountain of Life with his eyes banded and phylacteries covered with pseudo-Hebrew unrolling on the ground.⁶⁶ It was because Synagogue did not understand the meaning of texts such as those of Isaiah that he cannot see the live-giving waters in the fountain.

In both the painting and in the *RRM*, words are at stake. How are they to be understood? The *sine qua non* of the Fountain of Life is a correct understanding of the dual nature of Christ's being: it was both human and divine. The words in the Hebrew Bible referred to this reality, according to Christians, and the fault of the Jews was in not understanding what they were actually seeing. It was the refusal of the Jews and Gentiles to recognize Christ's divine nature that prevents them from enjoying the everlasting salvation offered by the Fountain of Life. This is what prevented them from understanding the true meaning of Isaiah.⁶⁷ This was their real sin: not being able to see the truth as Christians

64 Molinet J. *Faictz et dictz*, vol. 1, 403.

65 Molinet J. *Faictz et dictz*, vol. 1, 353.

66 See Pereda on meaning of unrolled phylacteries and blindness of Synagogue.

67 Philippe Frieden remarks that Molinet draws a parallel between the two parts of the *Romance of the Rose* and the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, "Le Rose et le Christ", 149. In chapter fifty, Molinet explains that Guillaume de Lorris symbolized Moses and

saw it. The bloody and cruel persecution of Jews in Spain, referred to in Molinet's poems devoted to Isabella and Ferdinand, his *Chronicles*, and the Prado *Fountain of Life*, was caused by this hermeneutic 'failure'. It was because they saw only the *charboucle* and not the *chair bonne* that they could not be married to Christ. Although Molinet seems to offer a way of overcoming the opposition of Synagogue and Church, it was still necessary to understand scripture as the Christians did in order to be present at the mystical marriage of Christ and his church. It was necessary to understand that Isaiah was actually referring to Jesus Christ's incarnation when he said that 'A virgin shall conceive and bear a son', in Isaiah 7:14. The mystery of the incarnation brings the fountain of life into being, yet, at the same time, also prevents non-believers from having access to its life-giving waters. For Molinet, it is what separates those who understand and interpret 'correctly' prophetic texts from those who do not. Knowing how to read, finally, is what gets you into the park of Christian salvation or keeps you out.

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Jean de Meung was like St. John the Evangelist (see *RRM* f. 71 r.) Frieden's insight helps readers understand how Molinet was actually trying to 'fill in the gap' (*comblent l'écart*) which separated the New and the Old Testaments (149). Frieden suggests, with a note of humor, that Molinet would have made the *Romance of the Rose* into a kind of new Bible (149). Yet Molinet's position in regards to the Bible itself remains that of a Christian who wanted to reconcile the Old and the New Testaments through the body of Christ. As charitable as that effort might have been it would inevitably leave those who did not accept the Christ's divinity with their spiritual thirst unquenched.

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PART 4

Transformative Analogies of Matter and Spirit



Figuring the Threshold of Incarnation: Caravaggio's Incarnate Image of the *Madonna of Loreto*

Ralph Dekoninck

Caravaggio's *Madonna dei Pellegrini* was painted around 1605–1606 for the Cavalletti Chapel in the church of Sant'Agostino in Rome, where it can still be seen today in its original setting [Fig. 13.1]. Compared to the interest that many of Caravaggio's works have aroused, it could be said that this painting has not received the attention it deserves. However, we will consider it here from one particular viewpoint alone: that of its connection to the cult of Loreto and to the specific status in the cult of the miraculous statue of the Virgin, located in the very site of the Incarnation.

Formerly dedicated to Mary Magdalene, the Cavalletti Chapel bears the name of the man who commissioned it, Ermete Cavalletti. He was a member of the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Trinity of Pilgrims and Convalescents, a charitable organisation founded in the fifteenth century to provide aid to the poor pilgrims who came to Rome in their thousands. It was this same Cavalletti who in 1602, a year before his death, organised a pilgrimage of the Confraternity to Loreto and who asked Caravaggio to create a painting whose subject would be the Virgin of Loreto, a commission that Caravaggio was to fulfil at the same time as he was working on the *Madonna dei Palafrenieri*. What cannot fail to intrigue the present-day viewer is not only the figures of the Virgin with Child and of the two pilgrims—which, as is well known, shocked a number of viewers in the seventeenth century—but also the very subtle play on thresholds and levels of reality that Caravaggio stages and which, as I will attempt to show, presents itself as a profound meta-pictorial reflection on the Incarnation.

But before exploring these plastic and spiritual issues, we need to be aware of the place and the success of the cult of Loreto in the very early seventeenth century.¹ A notable feature of this prominent Roman Catholic cult is that it is supposed to be devoted above all to the Santa Casa, i.e., the very site of the Incarnation, as we are reminded by an inscription on the facade of the Basilica of Loreto that quotes the text of Sixtus V's Bull: 'The house of the Mother of

1 See among others Bercé Y.-M., *Lorette aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles. Histoire du plus grand pèlerinage des Temps modernes* (Paris: 2011).



FIGURE 13.1 *Caravaggio, Madonna dei Pellegrini (ca. 1605–1606). Oil on canvas, 260 × 150 cm. Rome, Sant'Agostino.*

God where the Word was made flesh ('verbum caro factum est'). The Santa Casa is in fact none other than the House of Nazareth where the Virgin and her young Son are said to have lived. If we are to believe a legend that spread at the end of fifteenth century, the Santa Casa was miraculously transported by angels from Palestine to Italy (with a number of stops in between), just before the final expulsion of the Crusaders from the Holy Land at the end of the thirteenth century. Once it had arrived in Loreto, it became the reliquary of the Incarnation and hence the metonymic allegory of the Virgin herself. For the Jesuit Louis Richeome, who in 1603 devoted an entire book to Loreto, this house celebrates 'the mystery of mysteries, the first foundation of everything'.² It is 'the enclosure where the marriage of the Son of God with human nature was celebrated in the Virgin's womb [...]'.³ And when he evokes the house as 'enclosing in its enclosure the Virgin pregnant with Him whom the powers of the Heavens can neither circumscribe or understand',⁴ Richeome gives clear expression to the idea that this house is in some way pregnant with the Virgin, who is herself pregnant with the Son of God. Hence the Santa Casa resembles the Holy of Holies: '[...] this Chapel was also the Altar that bore the oblation of the body of the Son of God, more worthy still by this honor than the place in that Temple called Holy of Holies! For that had only the material Ark of the Hebrews, while this Chapel truly contains Jesus Christ, Holy of Holies'.⁵ So we may say with Pierre-Antoine Fabre that this house is just as much a place of miracles as it is the miracle of a place.⁶

Given the European, even global, success of this cult, the German Jesuit Wilhelm Gumpenberg chose in 1655 to place the Santa Casa on the frontispiece of his *Atlas Marianus*, a work which lists all the miraculous images of

2 Richeome Louis, *Le Pelerin de Lorete accomplissant son vœu fait a la glorieuse Vierge Marie mere de Dieu* [...] (Arras, Guillaume de la Riviere: 1604) 85: '[...] le mystère des mystères, le premier fondement de tout'.

3 Ibidem 84: '[...] l'enclos, où les noces du Fils de Dieu avec la nature humaine ont esté célébrées au ventre de la Vierge [...]'].

4 Ibidem 86–87: '[...] fermant en son pourpris la Vierge enceinte de celui que la capacité des Cieux ne peut cerner ni comprendre'.

5 Ibidem 87–88: '[...] cest Chapelle fut aussi l'Autel qui porte l'oblation du corps du Fils de Dieu, plus digne encore par cest honneur que le lieu d'iceluy Temple appelé Saint des Saints ! Car il n'avoit que l'Arche materielle des Hebreux, au lieu que ceste Chapelle contient en verité Jesus Christ Saint des Saints'.

6 Fabre P.-A., "En quête d'un lieu. Remarques sur le *Pèlerin de Lorette* de Louis Richeome", in Barry J. et alii (eds.), *Genius loci* (Paris: 1993) 185–206; and idem, "L'esclavonie, escale sur la route de l'Occident ?", *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 41 (2008) 25–38.

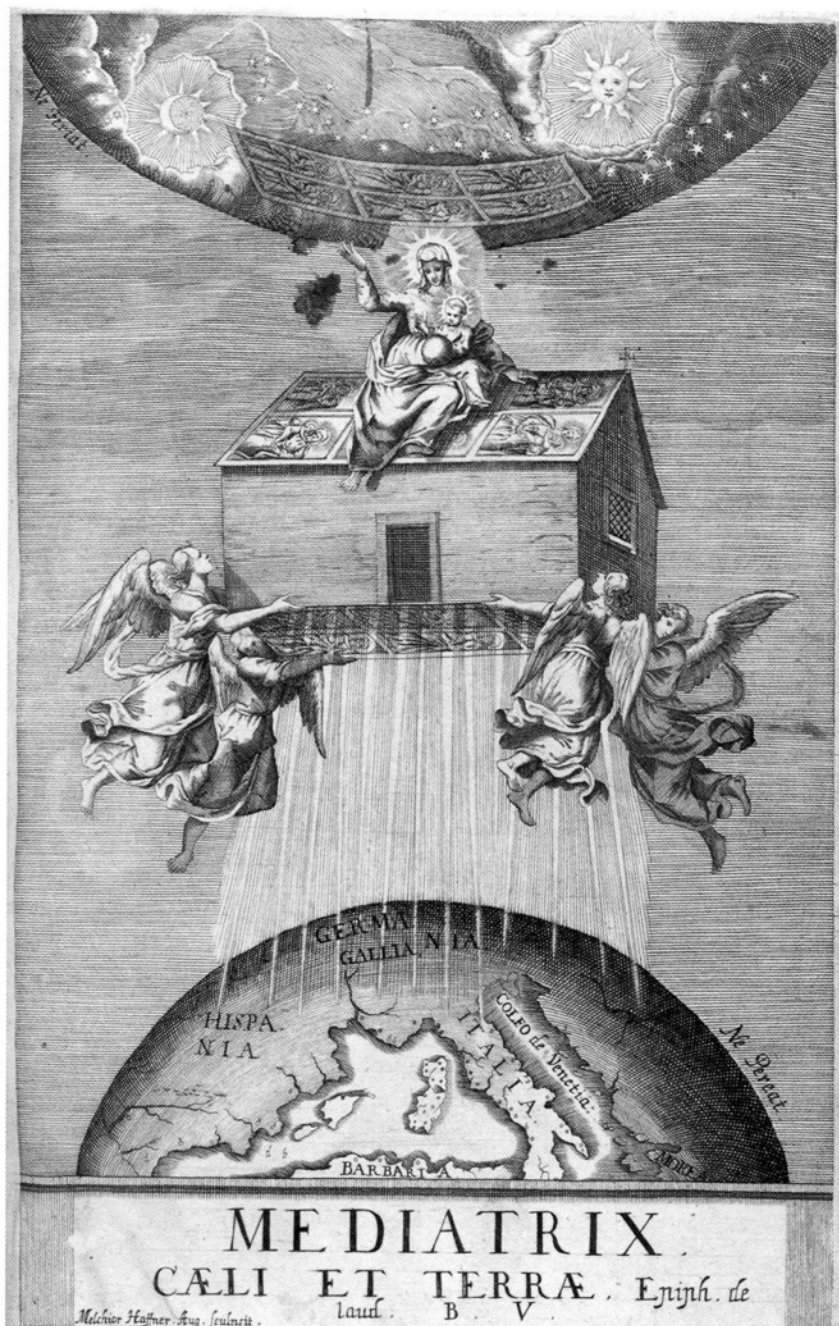


FIGURE 13.2 *Melchior Hoffner, Frontispiece to Gumpenberg W, Atlas Marianus (Munich, J. Jaecklin: 1672).*

the Virgin throughout the world [Fig. 13.2].⁷ In a rather original composition, the Loreto house takes the form of an architectural prism diffracting the single figure of the Virgin, who is enthroned on the roof as *Mediatrix caeli et terrae*. And on the roof and the base of this house one can see a series of Marian images that project over the whole terrestrial globe in the shape of rays of light. This liminal engraving, which also serves as the programme for the entire volume, therefore seems to communicate the following message: assimilated in metonymic fashion to the Virgin herself, the Santa Casa is seen not only as the place of the Incarnation of the Word but also as the matrix from which all images of the Virgin and her Son are generated. We may therefore speak of a close connection between the empty space of the Incarnation—in the manner of the Holy Sepulchre, the empty space of the Resurrection—and the images so produced.

With regard to the actual House of Loreto, we might also say that in some way the relic and the reliquary coincide. There are many accounts of devotional practices consisting in scratching the ground and the walls with the aim of gathering a little bit of dust to be used as a thaumaturgical agent, sometimes even by being swallowed.⁸ This reliquary building, inside which—in a kind of *mise en abyme*, to which I will return later—was a statue of the Virgin supposedly created by Saint Luke, was itself enveloped within another architectural 'box', the splendid marble screen designed by Bramante and sumptuously decorated by the best sculptors of the early 16th century, in particular Andrea Sansovino. And this new reliquary was itself integrated within the Basilica of Loreto. As with Russian matryoshka dolls, each space is thus nested within a more encompassing space. We may therefore speak of a distinct sacralisation of space accompanied by intense reflection on the thresholds nested inside one another. We should also note that the Santa Casa gave rise to the production of various replicas around the world, as if the architecture were once again travelling by duplicating the sacred space and thus inviting the believer to travel in his turn, in imagination or in reality, through these different sites.⁹

7 Gumpfenberg Wilhelm, *Atlas Marianus quo sanctae Dei Genitricis Mariae imaginum miraculorum origines duodecim historiarum centuriis explicantur* (Munich, J. Jaecklin: 1672).

8 The dust was collected in small packets decorated with a woodcut showing the image of the Holy House. It supposedly preserved its owner from the plague. See Bercé, *Lorette aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* 30.

9 See amongst others Ducreux M.-E., "La Santa Casa dans l'espace marial habsbourgeois au XVII^e siècle", *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 41 (2008) 39–71; and Clair M., "Une chapelle en guise de maison", *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 41 (2008) 89–108.

Rather than dwelling on these reproductions of the 'Holy of Holies', we will focus instead on the way the iconography was able to establish a close link between the Virgin and her house. As many authors have already remarked, we can identify two main iconographic traditions in the representation of the Madonna of Loreto.¹⁰ The first such tradition centres around the miraculous transport of the Santa Casa, showing the Virgin and Child enthroned on the roof of the house, which is carried by angels. The second tradition shows the Virgin of Loreto in an architectural setting. This latter type, which precedes the first historically, is in fact derived from the wooden statue that occupied the interior of the House of Loreto.

We will begin by considering the first type of tradition, which was by far the most widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The oldest formula consists in a hybrid image that to a certain extent assimilates the Santa Casa to the Virgin herself. As is shown for example by the painting by the Master of Fiastra, the figure of the Virgin is literally part of the architectural body, the lower part of her body merging with the house [Fig. 13.3].¹¹ But from the seventeenth century on this type of composition was undoubtedly seen as being somewhat archaic. A preferred image was that of the Santa Casa as a throne on which the Virgin sits with her Child; the figures are oversized in relation to the scale of the architecture, another archaism through which artists reflected upon the Santa Casa as the figure of the Virgin's womb and the place of the Incarnation. While this comparison cannot fail to remind us of the rich medieval metaphor identifying the ecclesiastical building with the Marian or Christic body, what we have here is a rather different kind of assimilation linked to a very particular physical space, one often described by pilgrims as a confined, intimate space—one might almost say, uterine—an impression reinforced by this system of matryoshkas placing the Holy House at the heart of a series of increasingly encompassing architectural spaces.

Now, at the centre of this sophisticated arrangement, the space of the Santa Casa is not actually empty: we have already mentioned the presence of a wooden statue of the Virgin, now preserved in the form of a replica, the 'original' fourteenth-century statue having disappeared in a fire in 1921 [Fig. 13.4].

10 See amongst others Grimaldi F., "L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto nell'arte. I prototipi iconografici", in Grimaldi F. – Sordi K. (eds.), *L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto nell'arte* (Loreto: 1995) 15–30; Bisogni F., "Iconografia lauretana: prototipi e sviluppi", in Citterio F. – Vaccaro L. (eds.), *Loreto, Crocevia religioso tra Italia, Europa ed Oriente* (Brescia: 1997) 329–248; and Ammannato C., "L'immagine lauretana nell'età della Riforma", in Citterio – Vaccaro, *Loreto* 349–362.

11 See Mariano P., "Maestro di Fiastra", in Grimaldi – Sordi (eds.), *L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto* 98–100.



FIGURE 13.3 *Maestro di Fiastra, The Santa Casa, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on canvas, 165 × 150 cm. Fiastra, Oratorio di San Rocco.*

This sculpted image is therefore strictly speaking the 'true' Madonna of Loreto, located on the main altar of the chapel at the centre of another series of interlocking architectonic settings that form the altar and arranged with a view, on the facing wall, of a window that is now blocked up and through which the Holy Spirit was said to have entered at the time of the Annunciation. The statue itself is enclosed in a wide cone-shaped robe, another type of material covering concealing the virginal body as invisible site of the Incarnation.

According to the oldest documents, it seems that veneration of the statue preceded veneration of the Santa Casa.¹² From this we may surmise that the

12 Bercé, *Lorette aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* 25.



FIGURE 13.4
 Madonna of Loreto, wood
 sculpture, end of the 14th century
 (destroyed in 1921).

sacralisation of the image was extended to the building in which it was sheltered. Whatever the chicken-egg relationship might be here, the sculpture appears to be so old that the earliest texts attribute it to Saint Luke himself or to the angels who were said to have transported it to this place, a legend that reminds us of the similitude between the house and the image it encloses. This sculpted prototype probably lies at the origins of the first and earliest iconographic type showing the Virgin and Child inside an architectural setting, a kind of baldachin that symbolises the Holy House supported by angels [Fig. 13.5]. Thus we have here a kind of visual coincidence between the Virgin and the house of the Annunciation represented as a genuine cocoon enveloping the virginal body, which itself occupies almost all the space, space which in some cases takes the form of a niche.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the miraculous statue located at the heart of the House of Nazareth is itself placed in an architectural setting that was slightly modified over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but whose overall structure remains fairly close to the original setting, with its subtle gradation of thresholds, repelling access to the sacred presence while at the same time setting the epiphany centre stage, each threshold visually symbolising a step towards something which can be apprehended as an apparition. Earlier painted representations of the altar sought to give this impression of a kind of incarnation. In effect, while the figure of the Virgin in them remains fairly static, it is also shown in a process of animation, often reinforced by the presence of angels that recall the angels carrying the Santa Casa [Fig. 13.6].

Visible only within the architectural reliquary and experienced by pilgrims as the authentic relic of the Incarnation capturing the invisible sacred presence contained in this room, the sacred image is also reproduced on the exterior walls of sculpted models reproducing the Santa Casa, thus displaying what cannot be seen inside [Fig. 13.7].¹³ While these three-dimensional representations of the House of Nazareth follow the iconographic schema adopted in painting, that of the miraculous *translatio*, they thus add on the external facade the figuration of the sculpted Madonna within its scenic arrangement. In one unique example, the Black Virgin is even reproduced on the roof of the building, the relic thus being exposed outside the reliquary [Fig. 13.8]. But these different evocations of the inner sacred presence do not seem to be sufficient: the Annunciation is often painted on the opposite side of these models, thus reminding us of what has been and continues to be produced in this mysterious space filled with the presence of Christ and of his Mother. And in a number of other cases, the dove of the Holy Spirit is also sculpted near the

13 Di Matteo M., "I plastici processionali della Santa Casa di Loreto tra devozione e architettura", in Grimaldi – Sordi, *L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto nell'arte* 46–64.



FIGURE 13.5
Maestro di Domo, Virgin and
Child, central panel of a triptych
(mid 15th century). Tempera on
wood. Serra San Quirico, Chiesa di
San Paterniano.



FIGURE 13.6 *Nicolò Trometta (attributed to), Madonna of Loreto (beginning 17th century). Oil on canvas, 242 × 154 cm. Urbania, Museo civico.*

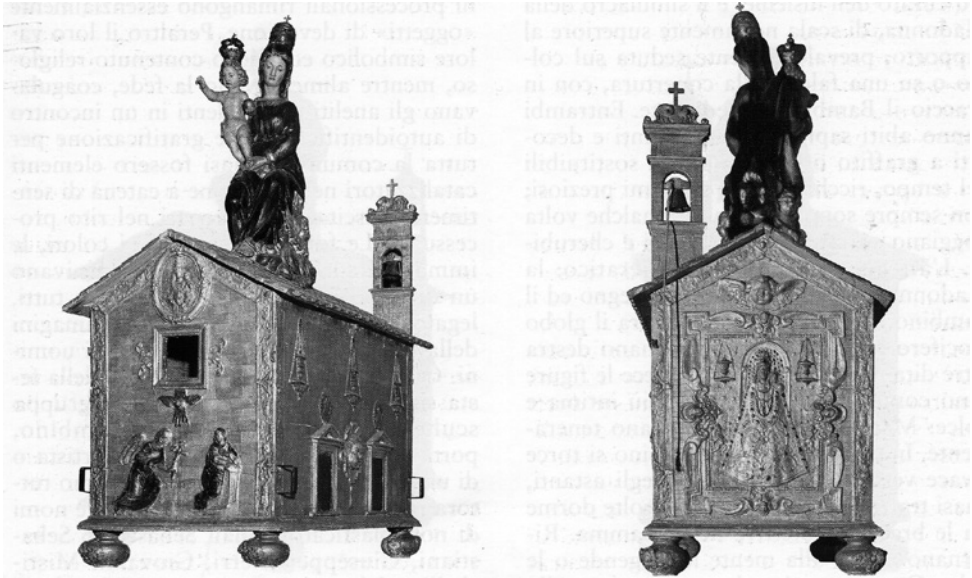


FIGURE 13.7 Model of the Santa Casa (17th century). Montalto Marche, Duomo.

window through which it entered into the House of Mary, a window that is sometimes surmounted by a bust of the Virgin, as the authentic *fenestra Dei*.¹⁴

This detour via Loreto can show Caravaggio's *Madonna dei Pellegrini* in a new light. The artist, in all probability, had been able to experience for himself the liminality of the sanctuary of Loreto in the winter of 1603–1604, when he was travelling in the Marche. But rather than expanding on the context of the creation and reception of this work, a context that has attracted the attention of many researchers,¹⁵ I would rather concentrate on the subtle way the

14 Note, too, that the Annunciation is also sculpted on the western side of Bramante's monument, the side on which is found the window of the Annunciation that merges with the tabernacle of the altar, thus suggesting the real presence of Christ inside.

15 I refer to the most recent study by Pamela Jones, "The Place of Poverty in Seicento Rome: Bare Feet, Humility, and the Pilgrimage of Life in Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto* (ca. 1605–06) in the Church of S. Agostino", in eadem, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (Aldershot: 2008) 75–136. See also Treffers B., "In agris itinerans: L'esempio della Madonna di Loreto del Caravaggio", *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 55 (1996) 274–292; Krüger K., *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren* (Munich, 2001), 267–272. Marini M., *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio 'pictor praestantissimus'* (Rome: 1989) 472–475; Pupillo M., *La SS. Trinità dei pellegrini di Roma. Artisti e committenti al tempo di Caravaggio* (Rome: 2001); and Zuccari A., "Caravaggio, sus comitentes y el culto lauretano", in Strinati C.M. – Vodret Adamo R. (eds.), *Caravaggio* (Madrid: 1999) 63–73.



FIGURE 13.8 *Model of the Santa Casa (17th century).
Sant'Angelo in Vado, Chiesa di San Filippo.*

painter plays on thresholds: the threshold first of all between the sacred and the profane, this latter embodied by the two pilgrims characterized in a highly profane way—as noted by commentators since the seventeenth century—in the etymological sense of what is located outside the sacred, but also of what runs the risk at any moment of profaning it by crossing over the threshold. But is it not also the Virgin who is on the point of crossing the threshold with a movement well nigh indescribable, a movement both static and dynamic,

of advance and of retreat, which confers on the figure the dancing appearance that has often been pointed out and whose model is to be found in the ancient sculpture of Thusnelda (Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi)?¹⁶ All the visual and physical meeting points are clearly overinvested: the joined hands of one pilgrim, for example, visually brush the left foot of Christ, while his own feet are at the exact height of the viewer, whose eyes touch them with his gaze. Furthermore, we should also note, as many others have done before me, the way in which the light strikes the characters, casting a shadow that projects onto the foreground and that is difficult to explain if we are dealing with an exterior view.¹⁷ Hence this insistent impression of indeterminacy between interior and exterior. Finally, we should note the way in which the shadow cast by the Virgin and Child marks the frame of something we have yet to identify, but which specialists have almost unanimously recognised as the frame of the door of the House of Nazareth, a door whose opening is lost in the obscurity and that has been related to the Marian symbolism of the *porta caeli*.¹⁸ Only M. Cinotti has highlighted the issues that are relevant to the ambiguity that seems to me to be the defining characteristic of this work: 'Merging symbol and reality, the painter has pictured the Madonna as sacred image within a niche and as living person greeting the pilgrims on the threshold of the Santa Casa'.¹⁹ This hesitation between door and niche adds to an observation already made by other scholars, namely the nature of the Virgin with Child as being at one and the same time both sculptural (some speak of the archaic or even 'neo-medieval' character of such a representation)²⁰ and alive.²¹ From this point of view, H. Hibbard's interpretation is symptomatic of the way in which this ambiguity has been resolved. While he acknowledges that 'this dead icon

16 Rosen V. von, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen des Darstellbaren. Ambiguität, Ironie und Performativität in der Malerei um 1600* (Berlin: 2009) 289–290.

17 Unless we consider, with P.-A. Fabre and other scholars, that this shadow is none other than the shadow from the left entrance to the church of Sant'Agostino. See Fabre, "En quête d'un lieu".

18 Calvesi M., "Caravaggio, o la ricerca della salvezza", *Storia dell'arte* 9–10 (1971) 116; and Zuccari, *Caravaggio* 68.

19 Cinotti M., *Caravaggio. La vita et l'opera* (Bergamo: 1991) 22.

20 Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers* 92: 'Perhaps the slightly archaic character of the Virgin's pose is a deliberate allusion to the ancient statue of the miraculous Madonna which stood over the main altarpiece in the interior of the Santa Casa in Loreto, action as intercessor for the pleas of the pilgrims'.

21 See Friedlaender W.F., *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton: 1955) 65; Marini, *Caravaggio* 34; and Calvesi M., *Caravaggio* (Milan: 1986) 47.

was transformed into magic life by Caravaggio's brush;²² he draws the conclusion that 'what we actually seem to see is not a niche in the Santa Casa but a Roman doorway; Caravaggio still painted what he saw and the connection with Loreto is unclear'.²³ The continuation of his argument is worth quoting: 'At first we may think that a statue of the Madonna has come to life—like Pygmalion's statue, but through the force of divine rather than earthly love. Finally, we decide that we are witnessing a particularly tangible apparition'.²⁴ As we can see, if such a reading begins by confirming the double nature of the image contemplated, its nature as a living sculpture, it ends by privileging the hypothesis of the visionary apparition on the threshold of the House of Loreto.²⁵ And yet Hibbard concludes by recalling that 'other paintings of the Cinquecento sometimes waver between showing an apparition, which was common, and an actual transformation, which was not'.²⁶ It is this indeterminacy that we now need to examine further.

In order to do this we need to reflect on the threshold that separates representation from real presence, which I believe is one of the main, if not the main, drivers of this work. It has rightly been pointed out that Caravaggio chooses an iconographic type derived from the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Loreto. Although it clearly appears that the *Madonna dei Pellegrini* has little in common with the archaic style of the statue venerated at Loreto, Caravaggio makes use of the figure of Christ in the act of blessing but gives him a strong physical presence that the light both reinforces and renders unreal, employing a plastic strategy peculiar to Caravaggio. It is well known that Caravaggio's heightened naturalism in the end confers on the image the appearance of an epiphany; it helps to convert the natural into the supernatural, an impression that could only have been strengthened when one reconstructs the lighting conditions of the time, since the work was located in a windowless chapel. Candlelight would have made this presence appear to vibrate. As P. Jones writes: 'the Madonna and Child would have appeared to be hovering above the painted and actual worshippers in the chapel'.²⁷ As for the chiaroscuro, as in many other works by Caravaggio it contributes to creating a suggestive zone of

22 Hibbard H., *Caravaggio* (New York: 1983) 187.

23 Ibidem 187.

24 Ibidem *Caravaggio* 187.

25 One of the first engraved reproductions of Caravaggio's painting, by L. Vorsterman, resolves the ambiguity by clearly showing a door-frame. See Moir A., *Caravaggio and his Copyists* (New York: 1976), n° 290, 98.

26 Hibbard, *Caravaggio* 188.

27 Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers* 96.

indeterminacy, which leads in the present case to uncertainty about the nature of the image perceived.

This leads us to question of the threshold in another way, this time according to the mode of vision of the depicted pilgrims. Just what is it that they see? There can be no more pertinent question when one notes that the male pilgrim's gaze is not really fixed on Christ or the Virgin but seems to be looking into a beyond which is lost in folds of fabric. In order to answer this question, we will once again take a detour via the issue of vision, as it was theorised and experienced in this period.

At that time, when it was a matter of reflecting on different modes of spiritual vision, the reference point was still the classical distinction established by Augustine between three visionary modes: *visio corporalis* corresponds to the ordinary vision we have of corporeal things in their presence; *visio imaginaria* or *spiritualis* is the mental representation we make of these same things in their absence, 'so that these images are true, like those that we have of bodies and that we retain in our memory, or fictive, like those we are able to create with the imagination'. Finally, *visio intellectualis* includes spiritual realities, realities that cannot be apprehended by any similitude taken from nature.²⁸ Seeing with the eyes of the body, seeing with the eyes of the imagination and of memory, seeing with the eyes of the intelligence—these are therefore the three modes of vision in the Augustinian typology, a typology which is of an essentially noetic nature.

Here is how a seventeenth century writer, Nicolas van der Sandt, alias Sandaeus, understands this visionary typology, once it has been transposed to the realm of the mystical:

We speak of *corporeal* Vision when Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the Saints or the Angels offer themselves to be seen or touched [...]. We speak of Vision *in imagination* when something Divine and heavenly offers itself to the imagination to be seen no less clearly than if this thing were contemplated with the eyes of the body. This vision is produced through figures drawn from the sensible world or formed by the Angels; and it offers itself so effectively and effortlessly to the imagination that it may nowise turn our spirit in any other direction.²⁹

²⁸ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XII, 6, 15, my translation.

²⁹ Sandaeus Maximilianus, *Pro Theologia Mystica clavis elucidarium, onomasticon uocabulorum et loquutionum obscurarum, quibus Doctores Mystici, tum ueteres, tum recentiores utuntur ad proprium suae Disciplinae sensum paucis manifestatum* (Cologne, Gualteriana: 1640) 364: 'VISIO Corporea est, quando Christus, B. Virgo, Sancti homines, vel Angeli

Sandaeus takes care to underline, as did many writers before him, that many visions that pass themselves off as corporeal are in fact visions in imagination.³⁰ Finally, 'intellectual vision is a manifestation of divine things which are offered to the contemplation of the intellect alone, either with the help of representations (*phantasmata*), or without these, through ideas (*species*) instilled and light implanted by God'.³¹ We should emphasise that imaginative vision acts as a bridge between the two other kinds of vision,³² in addition going so far as to confuse matters, resulting in a form of indeterminacy as to the nature of the image perceived. In effect, while this division attempts to make a clear distinction between three modes of apprehension of the divine, we can make out a certain confusion or, rather, porousness between the categories, which becomes evident in stories of mystical experience from this period, as also in such paintings as Caravaggio's.

Before returning to the *Madonna dei Pellegrini*, I would like to pause in consideration of an engraving and a painting. The former, entitled *Visio imaginaria*, was created a decade after Caravaggio's work and is one of a series of ten engravings by Antoon III Wierix on the different forms of mystical experience of a Carmelite friar [Fig. 13.9].³³ This Carmelite indirectly contemplates an

se videndos aut tangendos offerunt. [...] VISIO Imaginaria est, qua aliquid Diuinum & coeleste imaginationi videndum proponitur, non minus clarè, quam si oculis corporeis conspiceretur. Fit autem per figuras à sensibilibus acceptas, vel ab Angelis formatas; & tam efficaciter absque vlllo labore imaginationi offertur, vt non possit alio intellectum deflectere'.

30 Ibidem 364: 'Frequenter autem Visiones, quae putantur per corpora exterius exhiberi sunt dumtaxat imaginariae, per solam sensuum immutationem, nullo corpore exterius obiecto'.

31 Ibidem: 'VISIO Intellectualis est manifestatio rerum Diuinarum, quae solo intellectu inspiciendae obijciuntur; aut cum phantasmatum ope, aut sine illa, per solas species infusas, & lumina à Deo indita'.

32 This is how Augustine had already conceived of the role of the imagination; see Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XII 24, 51: 'Quapropter non absurde neque inconvenienter arbitror spiritalem visionem inter intellectualem et corporalem tamquam medietatem quamdam obtinere. Puto enim non incongruenter medium dici, quod corpus quidem non est, sed simile est corporis, inter illud quod vere corpus est, et illud quod nec corpus est, nec simile corporis'.

33 Some writers have chosen to identify this figure with Saint John of the Cross, even though no explicit reference to his life or work can be found. For a complete survey of this series, see Clifton J., "Secret Wisdom: Antoon Wierix's Engravings of a Carmelite Mystic", in Brusati C. – Enenkel K.A.E. – Melion W. (eds.), *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400–1700*, Brill Intersections 20 (Leiden – Boston: 2011) 639–666. For a full reproduction of the series, see Ruyven-Zeman Z. van, *The New*



FIGURE 13.9 Antoon III Wierix, *Imaginaria visio* (ca. 1620). Engraving, 11,4 × 7 cm. Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.

apparition in the form of an image located behind him in the clouds. His gaze literally performs a conversion, as can be seen by his rolled back eyes, which are the most obvious signs of a totally interior vision. The object of this vision is intriguing. In effect, what we see appearing in a rather indistinct fashion is a Virgin with Child within a frame that some have identified as a window frame, that is to say, one of the Marian metaphors (*fenestra caeli*). But this interpretation does not take into account the discontinuity of the rays that ought logically to pass through this window, which is not the case here. It is thus highly tempting to interpret this frame as the frame of a painting, the frame of a distant representation that is hardly visible. More than an apparition, this would therefore in fact be an apparition made image, which the Latin verse seems to confirm, since it refers to the vision as an image as if painted by God ('Mira Deus ipsi pingit velut in imagine').³⁴ We find here a way of bringing to mind the very nature of the visionary imagination, that it is to say, an image whose identity is located between body and intellect, oscillating between resemblance and difference, an image whose indeterminate nature is to be found in many accounts of mystical experience at this time.

Following J. Clifton,³⁵ and still remaining in the Carmelite world, we can compare this representation to an account by Teresa of Avila. In her autobiography, she relates the experience of a vision which is strictly imaginary but whose indeterminacy she at the same time highlights, choosing not to specify exactly the mode of vision:

It seemed clear to me in some cases that what I saw was an image, but in many other instances, no; rather, it was Christ Himself by reason of the clarity with which He was pleased to reveal Himself to me. Sometimes the vision was so obscure that it seemed to me an image, not like an earthly drawing no matter how perfect it may be—for I have seen many good ones. It is foolish to think that an earthly drawing can look anything like a vision; it does so no more nor less than living persons resemble their portraits. No matter how good the portrait may have turned out, it can't

Hollstein: *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, engravings and woodcuts 1450–1700. The Wierix Family*, 10 vols. (Rotterdam: 2004) VII 141–143.

34 'Dum maiora mens attingit, / Mira Deus ipsi pingit / Velut in imagine. / Amor nimis tunc ardescit, / Intellectusque clarescit / Tum miro phantasmate'. ('While the soul touches upon holier matters/ God paints for it marvels / As if in an image. / Love is greatly ignited, / The understanding enlightened / By so marvelous a vision'.)

35 Clifton, "Secret Wisdom" 657–658.

look so natural that in the end it isn't recognized as a dead thing [...]. For if what is seen is an image, it is a living image [...].³⁶

The quotation calls to mind a vivid image that appears only to the eyes of the soul; it evokes an image either animated or on the threshold of animation, the sort of image that a number of painters and engravers of this period exploited in order to express the oscillation between fiction and reality, between painting/sculpture and the body, which construes the visionary image an interface between two registers of reality.³⁷

Teresa describes this special status of the imaginary vision a little earlier in the same chapter, but with greater precision:

This vision, though imaginary, I never saw with my bodily eyes, nor, indeed, any other, but only with the eyes of the soul. Those who understand these things better than I do, say that the intellectual vision is more perfect than this; and this, the imaginary vision, much more perfect than those visions which are seen by the bodily eyes.³⁸

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- 36 Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel, Written by Herself*, in *Collected works, Vol. 1*, trans. K. Kavanaugh – O. Rodriguez, (Washington, D.C.: 1976) 240: 'Bien me parecía en algunas cosas que era imagen lo que veía, mas por otras muchas no, sino que era el mismo Cristo, conforme a la claridad con que era servido mostrármeme. Unas veces era tan en confuso, que me parecía imagen, no como los dibujos de acá, por muy perfectos que sean, que hartos he visto buenos; es disparate pensar que tiene semejanza lo uno con lo otro en ninguna manera, no más ni menos que la tiene una persona viva a su retrato, que por bien que esté sacado no puede ser tan al natural, que, en fin, se ve es cosa muerta. [...] Porque si es imagen, es imagen viva'. Cf. Teresa de Avila, *Libro de la vida*, in *Obras completas*, eds. Madre de Dios E. de la – Steggink O., O.C. (Madrid: 1986) 150–151.
- 37 See Dekoninck R., "Visual Representation as Real Presence: Otto van Veen's *Naples Vision of Saint Thomas Aquinas*", in Eck C. van – Gastel J. van – Kessen E. van (eds.), *The Secret Lives of Art Works: Exploring the Boundaries between Art and Life* (Leiden: 2014) 179–199; and idem, "Visio intellectualis uel sensualis. La vision napolitaine/parisienne de saint Thomas d'Aquin selon Santi di Tito", in Beyer A. – Morel P. – Nova A. (eds.), *Voir l'au-delà. L'expérience visionnaire et sa représentation dans l'art italien de la Renaissance* (Paris: forthcoming).
- 38 Teresa of Avila, *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus* 4: 'Esta visión, aunque es imaginaria, nunca la vi con los ojos corporales, ni ninguna, sino con los ojos del alma. Dicen los que lo saben mejor que yo, que es más perfecta la pasada que ésta, y ésta más mucho que las que se ven con los ojos corporales'. Cf. Teresa of Avila, *Libro de la vida* 150.

How then might this visionary and imaginal play that Teresa's account expresses be represented? How can a pictorial account be given of the unresolved nature of the object of vision? Some painters, like Caravaggio, did this by using contrivances that at first sight seem incongruous, at least in the light of the rhetoric and poetics that, to a certain extent, governed visionary painting in this same period.³⁹

Let's now turn to another painting, a painting that is much earlier than Caravaggio's and will allow us to circle back to the Madonna of Loreto. This is the *Vision of the Madonna of Loreto* painted by Michele Tosini around 1560 for the church of San Vincenzo in Prato [Fig. 13.10]. Both the object of the vision and its setting are very close to the treatment of the imaginary vision in Wierix's print. Here we really find a celestial window, and moreover, one that was originally surrounded by a three-dimensional frame.⁴⁰ The Virgin of Loreto appears very clearly as an apparition on which only Catherine of Alexandria appears to focus, whereas the other saints are absorbed in their meditations and holy conversation; this is undoubtedly a way of indicating that for them the vision of Our Lady of Loreto is strictly imaginary or intellectual.⁴¹ If the Virgin with Child thus framed is not, strictly speaking, a painting, it may easily be likened to a sculpture, and not just any sculpture but the very one venerated at Loreto, the painted features having been deliberately archaized so as to suggest the medieval origin of the figure. In addition to noting the metonymic relationship that allows this airborne Virgin to stand for the Santa Casa miraculously transported from Palestine to Italy, we may also observe that there is a certain ambiguity in the status of what is seen: is it the corporeal vision of a sculpture, the imaginary vision of an image formerly seen (at least in the form of one of its multiple copies) and now recollected, or the intellectual vision of the Virgin with Child; or again, is it a corporeal vision of the Virgin herself, who is seen to take on the features of her iconic image.

Is it not this very same indeterminacy that we find at the heart Caravaggio's painting? This fascinating painting is substantially different from the images that have just been commented on, in the sense that it makes the apparition come down to earth. But what is the nature of this apparition? I would propose that Caravaggio was deliberately playing on the ambiguity of the architectural

39 Stoichita V.I., *L'Œil mystique. Peindre l'extase dans l'Espagne du Siècle d'or* (Paris: 2011).

40 Horni H.J., *Michele Tosini and the Ghirlandaio Workshop in Cinquecento Florence* (Eastbourne: 2009) 62–67; and Grimaldi, "L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto" 118–121.

41 Krüger K., "Bild und Bühne. Dispositive des imaginären Blicks", in Kasten I. – Fischer-Lichte E. (eds.), *Transformationen des Religiösen. Performativität und Textualität im geistlichen Spiel* (Berlin: 2007) 219–248.

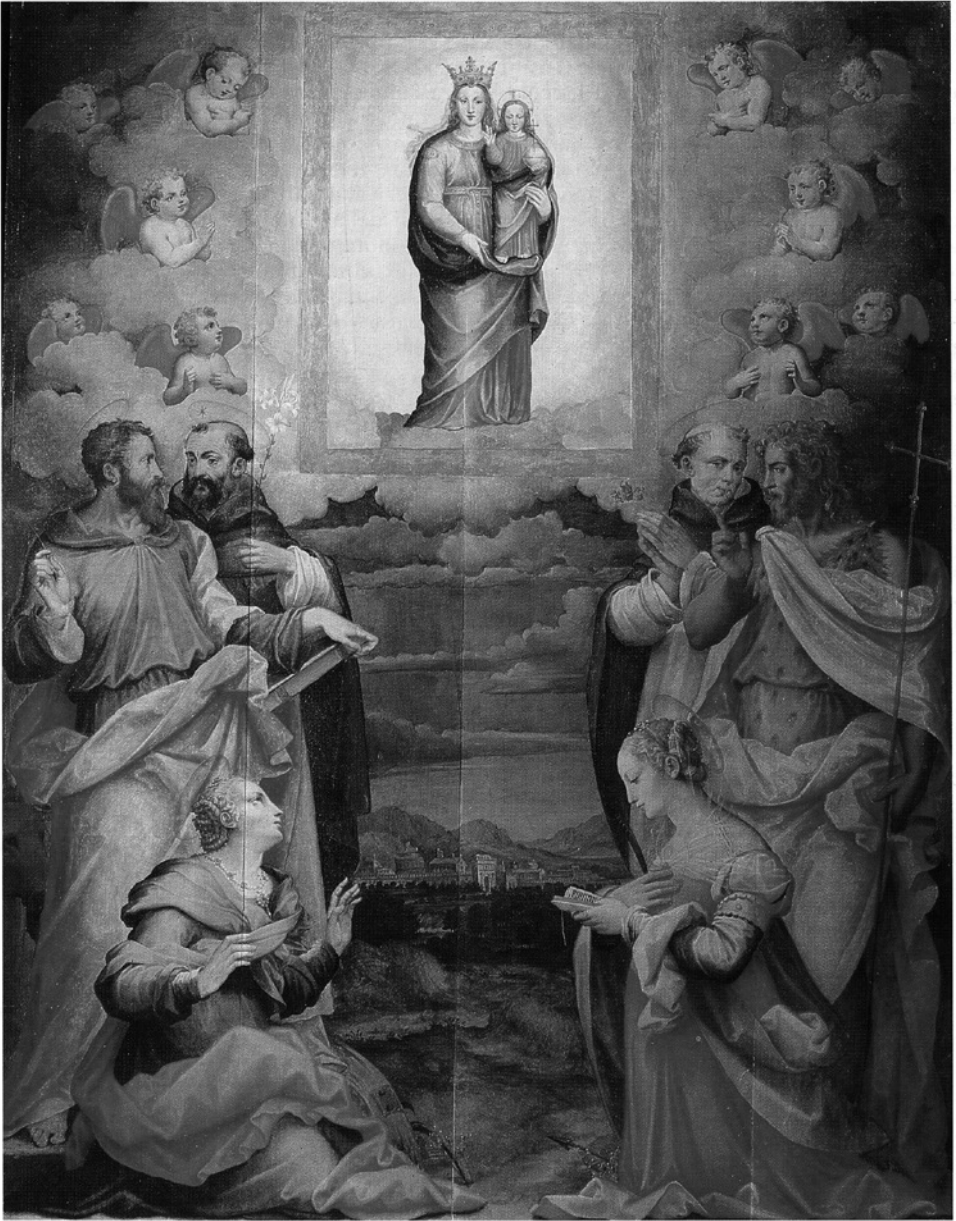


FIGURE 13.10 *Michele Tosini, The Virgin of Loreto (ca. 1560). Oil on canvas, 251 × 193 cm. Prato, Monastero di San Vincenzo, Cappella della Madonna di Loreto.*

setting, between niche and doorway, with a view to emphasising the transformation of representation into real presence. A number of arguments encourage such a hypothesis. First, entry to the church of Sant'Agostino was originally through the left portal, the same side where the Cavalletti Chapel is located, around three or four metres from the door. Now, entry to the Santa Casa was also originally gained by means of a lateral left entrance, two to three metres to the left of the altar where the miraculous image was enthroned. This doorway was walled up in 1531, but it was still venerated in Caravaggio's time as an authentic relic, since it was the threshold crossed on a number of occasions by the Virgin and Christ.⁴² Second, the *Madonna del Parto*, sculpted between 1516 and 1521 by Jacopo Sansovino, the leading pupil of Andrea Sansovino who, let us remember, created the sculpted enclosure surrounding the Santa Casa, stood at a distance of only a few metres from Caravaggio's painting [Fig. 13.11]. This *Madonna*, too, is sited in a niche. From the nineteenth century on it was reputed to be miraculous, attention being focussed from that time on the statue's feet, which extend beyond the sculpted frame of the representation. Whatever the beliefs attached to this work at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this trespass of the frame cannot fail to have resonated with Caravaggio's picture, just it may echo Raphael's *Prophet Isaiah*, painted for the same church, whose right foot likewise oversteps the frame. Third, a further piece of evidence is worthy of mention: this concerns the two nearby frescoes painted one or two years earlier (ca. 1603) by Cristoforo Casolani, one showing Mary Magdalene (probably in memory of the chapel's original dedication), the other Saint William of Maleval, both saints placed, like living sculptures, in trompe l'oeil niches; by comparison with Caravaggio's painting, this reinforces the impression that the Madonna of Loreto is detaching herself from a niche whose depths cannot be seen. This is what a number of representations depicting the Madonna of Loreto clearly show, such as the engraving by Antoine Lafréry that Hibbard related to the *Madonna dei Pelligrini* [Fig. 13.12].⁴³ Among later depictions, Guercino's painting of 1618–1619 (Pinacoteca Civica de Cento) showing *St Bernard of Siena and St Francis of Assisi with the Madonna of Loreto* seems to respond to the lesson of Caravaggio, at the same time retaining a setting that is more faithful to the arrangement of the miraculous statue's display at Loreto [Fig. 13.13].⁴⁴ We see the two saints in a contemplative pose fairly close to that of Caravaggio's two pilgrims, except that they are now placed at

42 Treffers, "In agris itinerans" 287–288.

43 Hibbard, *Caravaggio* 319.

44 Gozzi F., "La Vergine di Loreto e santi", in Grimaldi – Sordi (eds.), *L'iconografia della Vergine di Loreto nell'arte* 162–165.



FIGURE 13.11 *Jacopo Sansovino, Madonna del Parto (1518). Marble. Sant'Agostino, Rome.*

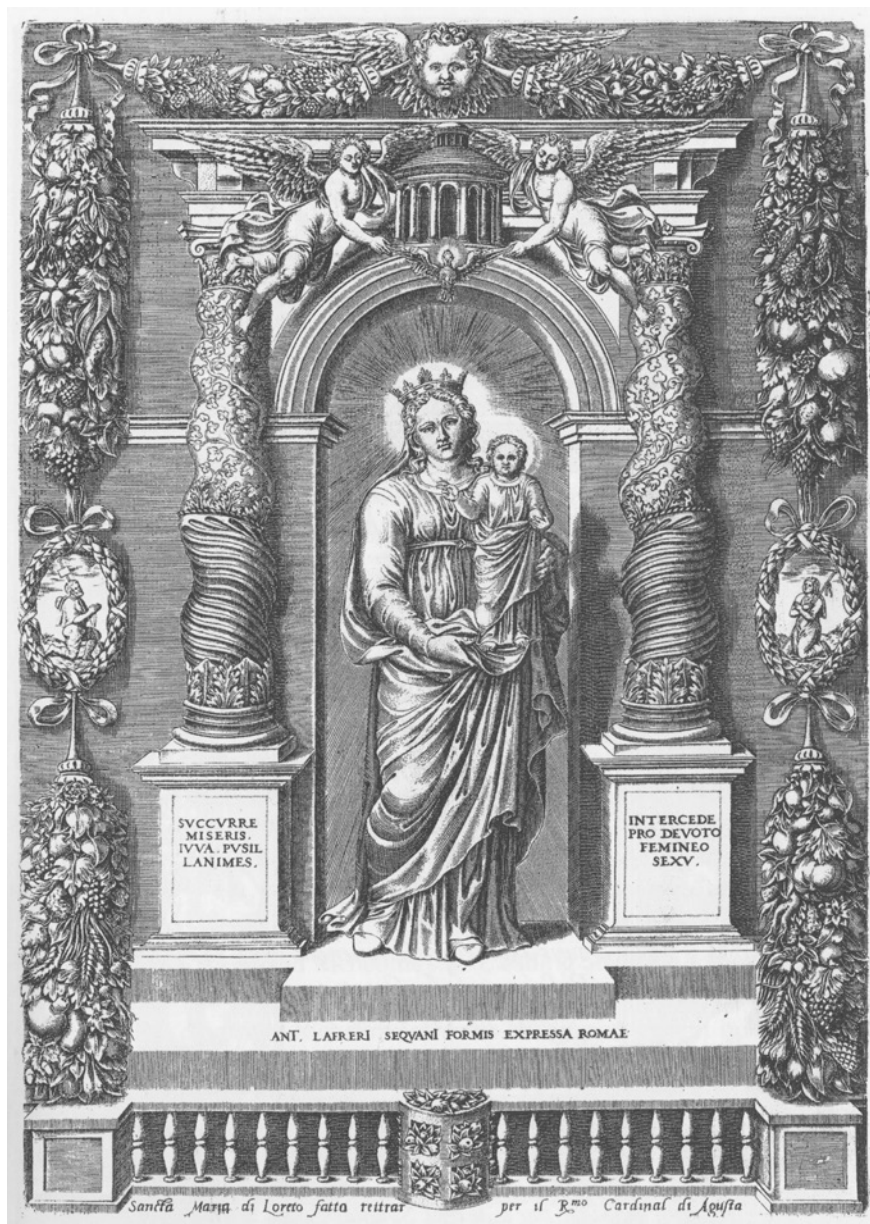


FIGURE 13.12 *Antoine Lafréry, Madonna of Loreto (late 16th century). Engraving. Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Rome.*



FIGURE 13.13 *Guercino, St. Bernard of Siena and St. Francis of Assisi with the Madonna of Loreto. Oil on canvas, 239 × 149 cm. Cento, Pinacoteca civica.*

the foot of an altar on which stands the Virgin with Child, clearly modelled on the Loreto prototype. This figure, about whose sculpted nature there can be no doubt, gives the impression of advancing in front of a niche.⁴⁵ Also worth mentioning is Poussin's *The Holy Family with Saints Elizabeth and John* (Musée Condé, Chantilly), which in terms of composition is clearly inspired by the painting in Sant'Agostino.⁴⁶ Poussin portrays the Virgin with Child descending from a pedestal, thus giving the impression that he too has taken from his model the effect of a work of sculpture coming to life.⁴⁷ In 1999, at the occasion of the restoration of the Caravaggio's *Madonna di Loreto*, it was discovered that an actual niche is situated behind the painting. The two restorers hypothesized that this niche housed a copy of the Loretan cult statue until the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ The statue would have been revealed and the painting removed to mark the feast of the Madonna di Loreto on the 10th of December.

All these observations allow us to conclude that the original *mise en scène* of the *Madonna dei Pellegrini* was undoubtedly conceived in order to create the impression of an image in transformation: the miraculous sculpture but equally Caravaggio's painting converts from effigy to apparition; the Virgin with Child no longer appears as a distantly levitating image but as a truly tangible presence in the very process of incarnation. Caravaggio's naturalistic style, criticised at the time for its lack of *decorum*, is here a perfect match for this incarnational dynamic that gives life to the image, the image of the statue as well as Caravaggio's image, and brings forth an enlivened image Christ, the supreme image of God, and of the Virgin. In some ways, this multi-dimensional

45 The Italian art theorist Francesco Scannelli, referring in 1657 to Caravaggio's painting, introduces a measure of ambiguity by speaking of 'image' in relation to the figure of the Virgin with Child: 'Whoever looks at this painting must confess that the spirit of the pilgrims is well rendered, for it shows their firm faith as they pray to the *image* in the pure simplicity of their hearts'. See Scannelli Francesco, *Il microcosmo della pittura* (Cesena, Peril Neri: 1657) 198; translation by Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* 189.

46 Posner D., "A Poussin-Caravaggio Connection", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 28 (1965) 130–133.

47 It is remarkable to observe that at a distance of four centuries, the theatre company *Teatri 35* in the series of tableaux vivants it created on the basis of works by Caravaggio (*Per Grazia Ricevuta*) offered a very similar staging of the Sant'Agostino painting, with the living figure of the Virgin perched on a podium and twisting her body before becoming still (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGdb-zSpUwI>, published May 15, 2013; the tableau vivant in question begins at the 19th minute). On this performative effect, see also Warwick G. (ed.), *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (Newark: 2006) 19.

48 Cardinali M. et al., "La *Madonna dei Pellegrini* di Caravaggio. Il restauro, la tecnica esecutiva e un inedito ritrovamento documentario", *Kermes* 40 (2000) 24.

image continues to move between different levels of reality, thus retaining the foundational idea of *transitus* but also of *translatio* (specific to the story of the Santa Casa) that shuttles between the sacred and the profane, between representation and presence, and among the corporeal, imaginary and spiritual modes of vision.⁴⁹

If we take into account the fact that a sculpted image of the Virgin stands at the heart of the religious and architectural setting of Loreto, and then consider how ambiguous is the status of the threshold shown in Caravaggio's painting—doorway, entry to the Santa Casa, or niche housing the statue of Loreto—we may discern an analogy between this vision experienced by his depicted pilgrims (as well as by the viewer of his painting) and the words of Teresa cited above; we need only substitute the name of the Virgin for that of Christ: 'Now and then it seemed to me that what I saw was an image; but most frequently it was not so. I thought it was the Virgin Herself, judging by the brightness in which She was pleased to show Herself. [...] for if what I saw was an image, it was a living image'. The Virgin with Child emerging from the shadows in Caravaggio's painting is a living image, the fruit of a visionary experience, but she also epitomizes different registers of figurability, allowing us to discern various modalities of being or modes of apparition (sensible and intelligible, visible and invisible, corporeal and spiritual) and to detect the movement of an image that invites us to see something else in another way. This dynamic is created liminally, across thresholds and levels of reality which make the stable realm of mimesis totter. Attending to this indeterminacy, striving to grasp it, allows us to apprehend the virtualities and latencies that contribute to the effectiveness of this kind of representation.

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49 It was a similar plastic meditation that Rubens was to submit four years later as the first version of the painting commissioned by the Oratorians for Santa Maria in Valicella. See Mühlen I. von zur, *Bild und Vision. Peter Paul Rubens und der 'Pinself Gottes'* (Frankfurt: 1998).

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Super-Entanglement: Unfolding Evidence in Hieronymus Bosch's *Mass of St. Gregory*

Reindert Falkenburg

In a study of Hieronymus Bosch's painting of the *Mass of St Gregory* published some years ago, I addressed a phenomenon that until then had hardly evoked any art historical comment—despite or because of the fact it is so utterly unique: the depiction of Golgotha atop the retable that decorates the altar of the saint [Fig. 14.1].¹ Whereas Bosch's work has produced an endless stream of commentaries and interpretations regarding his unconventional, phantasmal and bizarre imagery, the more traditional aspects of his style and iconography have largely failed to provoke serious attention. For this reason, perhaps, the easily recognizable representation of the Crucifixion at the apex of Gregory's altar has been taken for granted. The mode of representation, however, is as extra-ordinary, not to say bizarre, as the phantasmal fruits, animated rocks and hybrid demons that populate his dream-like landscapes and scenes of hell. Its extraordinariness lies in its hyperbolic realism and fractured relationship with the rest of its physical environment. I want to return to this strange pictorial device, since it has prompted me to formulate a thesis about the status and identity of Bosch's retable that goes beyond current thinking about this motif.²

* This paper is the result of my research as member of the 'Kolleg-Forscherguppe Bildevidenz. Geschichte und Ästhetik' at the Kunsthistorisches Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin, and participation in the colloquium 'Incarnation Doctrine and Art Theory', held at Emory University (April 2013).

- 1 Falkenburg R.L., "Hieronymus Bosch's *Mass of St. Gregory* and 'Sacramental Vision'", in Gormans A. – Lentens T. (eds.), *Das Bild der Erscheinung. Die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter* (Berlin: 2007) 179–206.
- 2 The discussion of the retable (Prado Museum, Madrid) has primarily focused on its interior, which is one of the reasons it figures in art historical publications under the heading "Prado Epiphany"—see, in particular, Brand Philip L., "The Prado *Epiphany* by Jerome Bosch", *The Art Bulletin* 35 (1953) 267–293; and Silver L., *Hieronymus Bosch* (Munich: 2006) 163–177. Also see Jacobs L., "The Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31 (2000), esp. 1033–1035; Schlie H., *Bilder des Corpus Christi. Sakramentaler Realismus von Jan van Eyck bis Hieronymus Bosch* (Berlin: 2002) 153–157; and Falkenburg R.L., "Para-typological Imagery in Hieronymus Bosch's *Prado Epiphany*", in Perlove S. – Eichberger D. (eds.), *Visual Typology in Early Modern Europe: Continuity and Expansion* (Turnhout: 2015), forthcoming. On dating of



FIGURE 14.1 Hieronymus Bosch, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the Epiphany Triptych (ca. 1505). Oil on wood, 138 × 72 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.

I will come to this thesis at the end of my exposition, but first, a disclaimer: a more in-depth discussion of its implications for the exterior and interior of the retable will appear not here, but in a forthcoming study.

The retable of which it forms the summit is a multi-layered construction that seems to consist partly of stone—i.e., the-relief-like slab or tombstone that rises behind the Man of Sorrows at the center of the composition—and partly of a frieze of Passion scenes painted, it would seem, in grisaille, surrounding the central slab. Christ stands out against this background as a three-dimensional figure, rising from a solid sarcophagus positioned behind Gregory's altar. This overlapping play with two- and three-dimensional modes of representation was not uncommon in depictions of the Mass of St. Gregory, as contemporary examples indicate. In Israhel van Meckenem's engraving of the Mass of St Gregory, for example, there is an intricate interplay between the Man of Sorrows, who appears physically embodied, standing in front of a cross rising from a sarcophagus at the center of a large altar, before what seems to be a painted altarpiece showing scenes from the Passion, and a collection of diagrammatic images of the *arma Christi* projected onto the choir space behind the altar [Fig. 14.2]. If one looks at this complex ensemble not in the 'Albertian' way people apply to post-Renaissance painting (i.e. letting one's gaze penetrate from fore- to background, as if one were looking through a window into a space behind the windowpane), but in reverse direction, this succession of Passion scenes seems to move toward the viewer, gradually progressing in corporeality, propelling, as it were, the figure of Christ from the realm of signs into the real world, thus making the concept of Christ's bodily presence on the altar visually palpable. The engraving of Master IAM van Zwolle of the same subject offers a similarly dynamic suggestion of Christ appearing *in corpore* on Gregory's altar—not as a vision, but 'in real life' [Fig. 14.3]. In both engravings, it is remarkable how the Crucifixion, the central moment in the history of salvation, and the central subject of the retable placed at the rear of St. Gregory's altar, is hidden from view by the figure of the Man of Sorrows. The subtle interplay between this figure and what is visible of the pictured retable behind him compensates for this conspicuous occlusion. The cross placed directly behind

the triptych, see Koreny F.—with cooperation of Bartz G. – Pokorny E., *Hieronymus Bosch. Die Zeichnungen. Werkstatt und Nachfolge bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts. Catalogue raisonné* (Turnhout: 2012) 35–54; on the identity of the donors, see Duquenne X., "Peeter Scheyfve et Agnès de Gramme, donateurs du triptyque de l'Adoration des Mages de Jérôme Bosch (vers 1494) conservé au Prado", in Verougstraete H. – Janssens de Bisthoven C. (eds.), *The Quest for the Original: Symposium XVI, September 21–23, 2006—Underdrawing and Technology in Painting* (Louvain: 2009) 27–33.

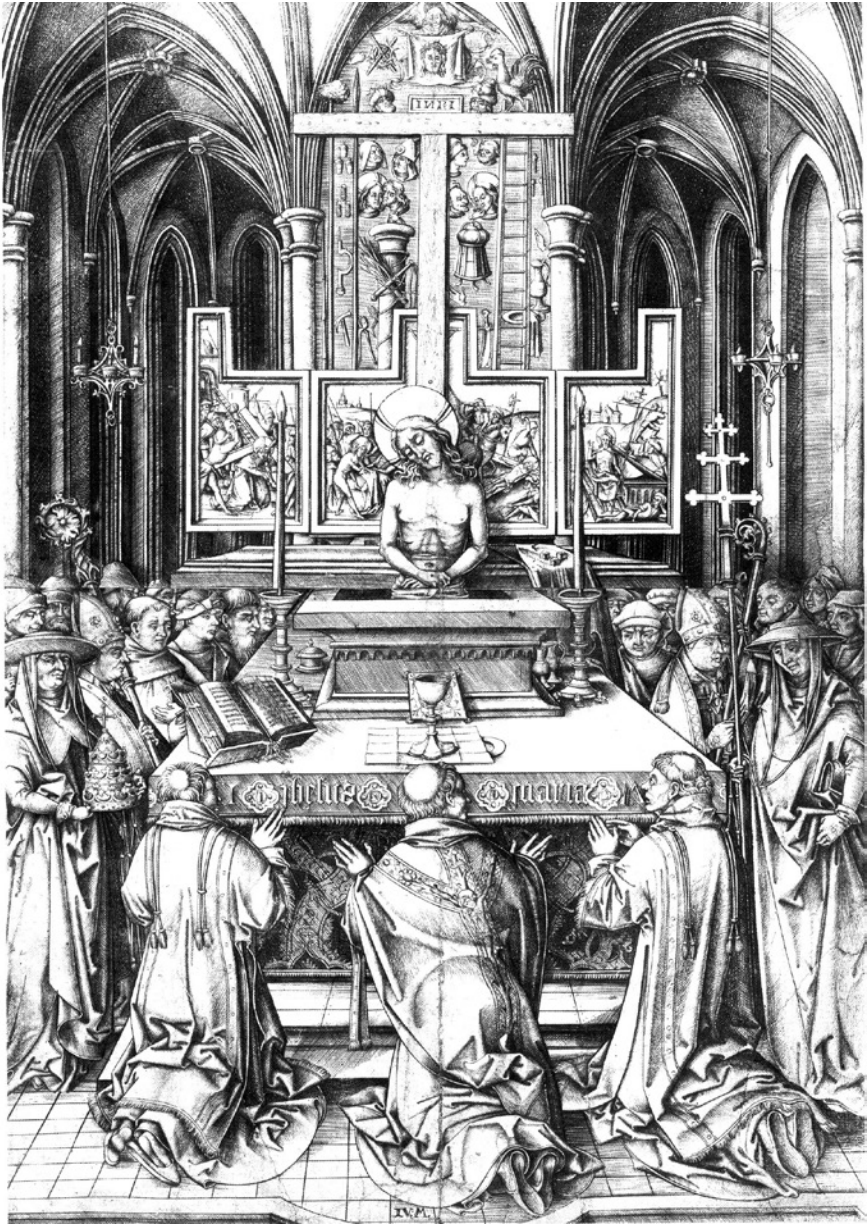
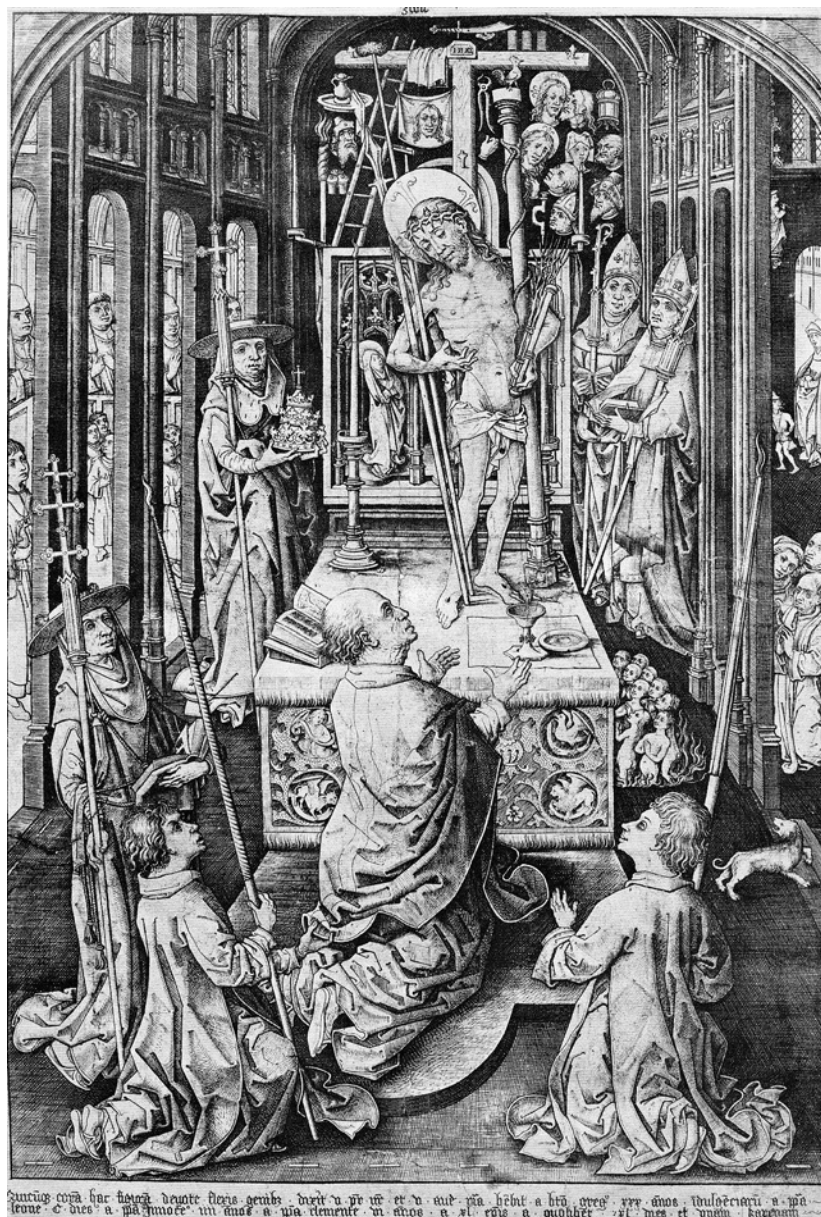


FIGURE 14.2 *Israhel van Meckenem, "Mass of St. Gregory" (ca. 1490–1495). Engraving, 464 × 295 mm. Washington, National Gallery of Art.*



Sanctus corpus dei nostri digne fidei gerens. digne a se ut et a. aut. pia. habet a. h. greg. 777. annos. indulgentiarum a. pa. leone. e. dies. a. pa. junior. in. annos. a. pia. clement. in. annos. a. p. rps. a. quodlibet. xi. dies. et. vana. karissimi.

FIGURE 14.3 Master IAM of Zwolle, "Mass of St. Gregory" (ca. 1500). Engraving, 323 × 224 mm. Munich, Bayerische Grafische Sammlung.

the Man of Sorrows in both prints, precisely because it obscures the Crucifixion scene in the retable, 'replaces' the cross in the latter and gives visible expression to the theological notion that the sacrifice of Jesus's body in the Eucharist re-enacts his historical sacrifice on Golgotha. In the engraving of Master IAM of Zwolle, this suggestion of a close connection between the Man of Sorrows and the representation of the Crucifixion on the retable behind him goes even further—resulting in the suggestion, perhaps strange for the modern viewer, that the figures in the altarpiece are in a way 'alive' as well. The Virgin Mother in the retable looks up at her crucified son (who is invisible to the viewer of the retable); the Man of Sorrows, in his movement of showing Gregory the side wound, has tilted his head, creating the impression that his half-opened eyes meet the gaze of his mother in an exchange of mutual compassion *across* the spatial and material divide between the real and the representational worlds.³ A painting by the Master of the Aachen Altarpiece in the Walker Art Gallery goes even further in connecting these realms, by conflating a vision of the Man of Sorrows who shows his wounds to St Gregory, with a painted retable at the back of the altar, in such a way that it becomes impossible for the viewer fully and clearly to distinguish between the two [Fig. 14.4]. A comparison with a painting on this theme by the Master of the Bartholomew Altar, in Trier, shows that the awkwardly bent posture of the Man of Sorrows in the Liverpool painting should probably be understood as Christ's upper body leaning forward: his feet are positioned to suggest that he is about to step down from the frame of the retable, which coincides with the ledge forming part of the sarcophagus behind him. In the retable / vision, the *arma Christi* are replaced by lively gesticulating figures, probably borrowed from the iconography of the Deposition from the Cross [Fig. 14.5]. These figures enhance the impression of liveliness given by the Man of Sorrows, and endow the painting / vision itself with a sense of 'real life'.

Seen against the backdrop of these late-medieval explorations of the pictorial image, where concrete reality comes together with the 'medial' register of the pictorial, with visionary reality, and with the imagination of the viewer, evincing Christ's *presentia realis* on the altar at which a priest celebrates the Mass, Bosch's exploration of the same idea in the Madrid painting proves conceptually to be far from unique. His pictorial treatment, however, is surely exceptional, for in a dramatic and even shocking manner, it entirely

3 A similar kind of orchestrated visual interplay of sculptures across (sometimes large) spatial divides in late-medieval churches has been explored in the innovative study by Jackie Young, *The Gothic Screen: Sculpture, Space, and Community in French and German Cathedrals, ca. 1200–1400* (Cambridge: 2012).



FIGURE 14.4 *Master of the Aachen Altarpiece, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the Crucifixion Triptych (ca. 1492–95). Oil and tempera on wood, 107 × 54 cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.*

destroys the usual distinction between *signum* and *res* [Fig. 14.6]. Bosch's Man of Sorrows, painted on the joined central bars of the frame in its closed state (like the Crucifixion scene, on which more below), is positioned in front of a retable, the central part of which appears to be made of stone, judging from the relief-like structure of the bordering frieze of angels and from the shadow this structure casts on one side of the retable's second, outer frame showing narrative scenes from the Stations of the Cross. The entire painting is executed in grisaille, i.e., in a yellow-brown tonal palette, and this makes it difficult to discern whether the outer frieze is painted in grisaille, too, and as such, meant to be read as (represented as if) executed in paint, its material status differing from that of the central stone slab. This tonal coloring also makes the figure of the Man of Sorrows slightly ambiguous with regard to its—or, better, his—representational status, as it / he seems to be bodied forth in three-dimensions in front of the retable (given the shadow the figure casts on the slab). This ambiguity is enhanced by the somewhat painterly-coarse brushwork with which Bosch has portrayed the figure, causing it to appear painted on (and in) the painting of a retable (seemingly) consisting of partly painted, partly stone

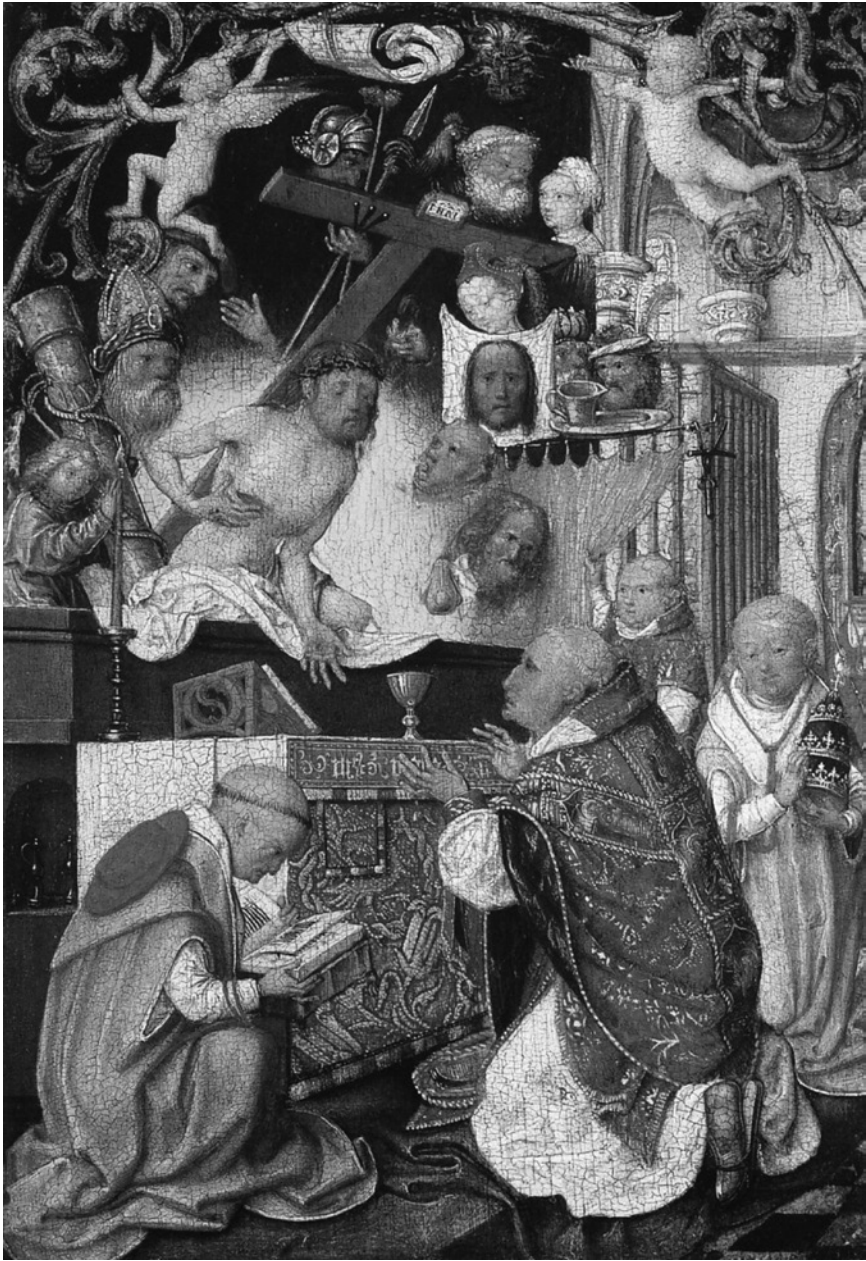


FIGURE 14.5 *Master of the Bartholomew Altar, "Mass of St. Gregory" (ca. 1500–1505). Oil on wood, 28 × 19,5 cm. Trier, Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözanmuseum.*



FIGURE 14.6 *Hieronymus Bosch, "Mass of St. Gregory", exterior of the Epiphany Triptych (ca. 1505). Oil on wood, 138 × 72 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum. Detail.*

parts. The result of this ambiguity is that the figure of the Man of Sorrows, as his pictorial identity seems to hover between two and a three dimensions, appears to the viewer to 'remove' himself from the background and to assume a concretely living presence on St. Gregory's altar. This dynamic is suggested with far more subtle and sophisticated pictorial means than in paintings of the period showing Christ actually stepping onto Gregory's altar, such as Adriaen Isenbrandt's version of the theme [Fig. 14.7]. The intended effect, however, is the same: to have the viewer participate in Gregory's vision of Christ's real presence on the altar, through a transformation of physical into imaginary vision, and thereby to 'train' the viewer's inner eye, preparing it to 'see' the true presence of Christ's sacrificial body in the host, once it has been transformed in the *mysterium* of the Eucharistic rite.⁴

The term 'incarnational imagery', though not commonly used in this context, seems appropriately to describe the representational ambiguities in Bosch's *Mass of St Gregory*, and in many other works produced around this time. These ambiguities do not so much 'animate' the image per se (which would constitute a form of idolatry), as make the viewer 'see' God's invisible presence in the Eucharist here and now, allowing him or her to experience this salvific presence as a force, or flow, directed at transforming the inner self of the beholder. Several authors have argued that the widespread occurrence of images of the Mass of St Gregory in the late Middle Ages, rather than visualizing the theological dogma of transubstantiation, serves instead to offer the believer visual support (ambiguous by its very nature) for an inner or trans-visual experience of the invisible presence of Christ on the altar.⁵ One should not disconnect the dogma too strictly from devotional practice centering on the Eucharist—on

4 Meier E., *Die Gregorsmesse. Funktionen eines spätmittelalterlichen Bildtypus* (Köln – Weimar – Wien: 2006), emphasizes that images of the Mass of St Gregory occurring in Eucharistic settings were consistently used as visual incentives for believers to 'see' Christ's presence in the consecrated host.

5 Cf. Walker Bynum C., "Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century", in Hamburger J.F. – Bouché A.-M. (eds.), *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton: 2006) 208–240. Walker Bynum argues that late-medieval images of the Mass of St Gregory address the fundamental ambiguity of 'seeing' the invisible presence (and absence) of Christ in the consecrated host. On this phenomenon, also see Gärtner C., "Die 'Gregorsmesse' als Bestätigung der Transsubstantiationslehre? Zur Theologie des Bildsujets", in *Das Bild der Erscheinung* 125–153. Cf. Smits Van Waesberghe M., "Iets over de leer en praktijk van de geestelijke communie in de Middeleeuwen, voornamelijk in het licht van de vaderlandse devotie-literatuur", *Studia Catholica* 19 (1943) 129–140, 172–187; and Caspers C., "The Western Church during the Late Middle Ages: *Augenkommunion* or Popular Mysticism", in Caspers C. – Lukken G. – Rouwhorst G., *Bread of Heaven: Customs and Practices*

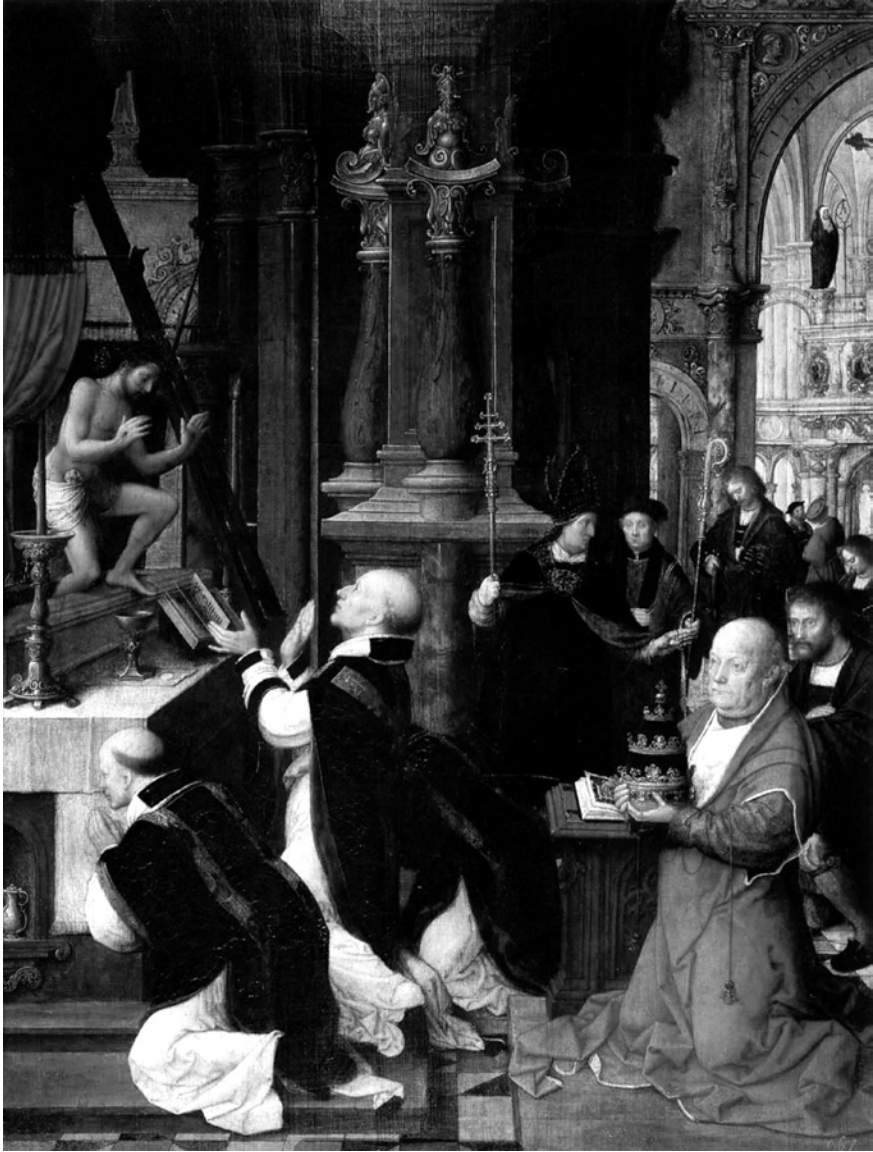


FIGURE 14.7 *Adriaen Isenbrandt, Mass of St. Gregory (1st half 16th century). Oil on canvas, 72 × 56 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.*

the assumption that late-medieval lay people (the intended audience of these images) 'naturally' did not understand theological fundamentals, or were given only to simple and sensational forms of 'Schauförmigkeit'.⁶ I would argue that ambivalences in the representation of two- and three-dimensional forms—which one also frequently observes in grisaille painting of the period—did not serve (at least not initially) to promote an intra-artistic *aemulatio*-debate on the primacy of painting over sculpture, or vice versa, as has been suggested recently.⁷ Rather, the purpose of such devices was to foster *belief* in (or, better, to suggest) the active and real presence of God's salvific work in the here and now, by orchestrating an 'animated' reading of the work of art.⁸

It is this purpose, I think, that Bosch's extraordinary invention—the representation of the Crucifixion as an event *really* occurring on the *actual* Mount Golgotha above St Gregory's altar—serves to realize. The retable appears to have come to life: instead of a monochrome image of the Crucifixion in the manner of the other pictured Stations of the Cross framing the altarpiece, the frame itself has been transformed into a real, three-dimensional hill, and the death of Jesus and the two murderers staged as an actual event. The *iconographic* term 'Crucifixion' fails to do justice to this scene, which unfolds as an historical *event* that *also* takes place in the present. To call it an event underscores how this portrayal differs from many late-medieval representations: the activity of erecting the two murderers' crosses enlivens the more static representation of Christ who already hangs on his cross, surrounded by the Virgin

Surrounding Holy Communion. Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture (Kampen: 1995) 83–97.

- 6 Cf. Scribner R.W., *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400–1800)*, ed. L. Roper L. (Leiden – Boston – Cologne: 2001) 85–145; and Falkenburg, "Bosch's *Mass of St. Gregory* and 'Sacramental Vision'" 179–185. For a critique of Scribner's concept of 'Schaulust', see Schnitzler N., "Illusion, Täuschung und schöner Schein. Probleme der Bildverehrung im späten Mittelalter", in Klaus Schreiner K. – Müntz M. (eds.), *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch—soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen* (Munich: 2002) 221–242; Lentjes T., "'As far as the eye can see [...]': Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages", in Hamburger – Bouché (eds.), *The Mind's Eye* 360–373; and idem, "Inneres Auge, äußerer Blick und heilige Schau. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur visuellen Praxis in Frömmigkeit und Moraldidaxe des späten Mittelalters", in Schreiner – Müntz (eds.), *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* 179–220.
- 7 See, for example, Preimesberger R., "Zu Jan van Eycks Diptychon der Sammlung Thyssen-Bornemisza", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54 (1991) 459–489; Krieger M., "Die niederländische Grisaillemalerei des 15. Jahrhunderts. Bemerkungen zur neueren Literatur", *Kunstchronik* 49 (1996) 575–588; and Borchert T.-H., "Color lapidum: A Survey of Late Medieval Grisaille", in idem (ed.), *Jan Van Eyck – Grisailles* [exh. cat., Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid] (Madrid: 2009) 239–253.
- 8 Cf. Schlie H., *Bilder des Corpus Christi* 329ff.

Mary, John, Mary Magdalene (who embraces the foot of the cross) and two other women. Moreover, the space surrounding this scene is not simply the realm of the church or choir behind Gregory's altar, it is the real sky above Golgotha, darkened in accordance with the description in *Matthew* 27:45, when Jesus hung dying. On the left side (i.e., Christ's right side) an angel, apparently awaiting the soul of the 'good' murderer, hovers in the sky, and light pierces patchy ink-black clouds. On the right, the cross of 'bad' murderer has yet to be erected; Judas is seen hanging from a tree, while a demon surrounded by black birds carries his soul away into the darkness. A tiny spot of color evocative of hellfire seems to spit out the birds, disrupting the representational character of the scene, along with its uniform monochromy, and instead emphasizing its *presentational* character: the historical event of the Crucifixion is at one and the same time a pictorial illusion, 'vision,' and (Eucharistic) *fact* occurring in the present. Within the broad frieze of Passion scenes the 'bad' murderer functions as a transitional figure: while being dragged to the top of the hill, he looks back at Christ and the scene of the Carrying of the Cross, which (still) forms part of the 'pictured' Passion. Viewed as part of the Stations of the Cross culminating in the three-dimensional reality of the Crucifixion, the topmost scene has the potential to 'animate' or enliven the other Passion scenes, bringing them to life in the eye of the viewer—something late-medieval believers were generally encouraged to do, i.e., to meditate on the *arma Christi* and inwardly to represent the Stations of the Cross, during the celebration of Mass.⁹

It is obvious that the theology of the Eucharist as the re-enactment of the historical Crucifixion underlies Bosch's pictorial invention, and that the alignment of the Crucifixion and the Man of Sorrows is meant to be seen as a 'typological' construct in which the first prefigures the second.¹⁰ This kind of thinking, which became widespread in the late Middle Ages through the *Biblia pauperum* and the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, clearly also informs the alignment of the Crucifixion and the Man of Sorrows in other contemporary representations of the Mass of St Gregory. The *Speculum humanae salvationis*, in its many late-medieval vernacular copies, testifies to the belief

9 On the meditative function of the *arma Christi* in general, see Suckale R., "Arma Christi. Überlegungen zur Zeichenhaftigkeit mittelalterlicher Andachtsbilder", *Städel-Jahrbuch*, N.F. 6 (1977) 177–208; and Rimmele M., "Geordnete Unordnung. Zur Bedeutungstiftung in Zusammenstellungen der Arma Christi", in Ganz D. – Thürlemann F. (eds.), *Das Bild im Plural* (Berlin: 2010) 219–242. On (lay) meditation as a form of spiritual communion during Mass, see Smits Van Waesberghe, "Iets over de leer".

10 Cf. Ohly F., "Halbbiblische und außerbiblische Typologie", in idem, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: 1977) 361–400, esp. 368ff.

that the *hic et nunc* of the believer is subsumed into the ongoing revelation of the history of salvation, and that events and persons in the here and now (not only Christ's renewed sacrifice on the altar) continue to operate within the typological structure of this grand history.¹¹ The ambiguities in the (re-)presentational identity of the Crucifixion scene and the Man of Sorrows, matters of doubt explored not only by Bosch but also his contemporaries, accord with an idea central to this kind of thought: namely, that when the prefigured 'promise' of the historical event is fulfilled in the new event, the first is folded into, and partakes in, the actuality and reality of the latter. The way Bosch has rendered this unfolding of an enfolded typological relationship goes beyond anything his contemporaries offer, differing in degree if not in kind. There is no identifiable place where the sky above the Crucifixion scene changes into the real space surrounding Gregory's altar. Thus the church in which Gregory celebrates Mass *is* the place of the historical Crucifixion: the darkness of the Crucifixion sky blends with and becomes one with the otherwise unspecified architectural space around the Eucharistic altar.¹²

The idea for this radical but, from a typological viewpoint, 'logical' invention that literally superimposes upon the Eucharistic retablo a 'presentational'—'incarnational'—representation of the pivotal event in the history of salvation, may have originated in Bosch's knowledge of contemporary carved altarpieces. Lynn Jacobs has suggested that Bosch's choice of the Mass of St Gregory as the theme for the exterior of the *Epiphany Triptych* may have been inspired by the popularity of the subject in carved altarpieces.¹³ Jacobs does not elaborate on this suggestion, which deserves further to be considered, since it provides an important context and source for Bosch's treatment of the theme, especially for his idea of integrating Mount Golgotha into a modern Gothic church

11 See, for example, Cardon B., *Manuscripts of the Speculum humanae salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c. 1410–c. 1470): A Contribution to the Study of the 15th Century Book Illumination and of the Function and Meaning of Historical Symbolism* (Leuven: 1996); and Kramer B., *Een lekenboek in woord en beeld. De Spiegel der minschliken zalicheid* (Hilversum: 2013), esp. 142ff.

12 Cf. Meertens M., *De Godsvrucht in de Nederlanden naar handschriften en gebedenboeken der xv^e eeuw. III Eucharistische Gebeden* (n.p.: 1932) 71, which quotes a fifteenth-century prayer—to be recited before the believer goes communion—in which Christ's sacramental body in the Eucharist is equated with his sacrificial body on the Cross: '[...] opdat we zonder twijfel geloven moeten "dat waerde lichaem dat (wij) vanden outaer begeer(en) te ontfungen, dat selve lichaem te wesen", dat zij ([Mary] van den H. Geest ontving, maagdelijk baarde en aan het kruis zag hangen'.

13 Jacobs L., *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park: 2012) 201.

environment. This integrative device, as we have seen, is used to imply the conflation of salvific-historical 'space-time' and of Christ's renewed sacrifice on the altar during the Canon of the Mass. There are many late-medieval carved retables that stage the axial relationship between the Crucifixion and the Eucharist by inserting a three-dimensional depiction of Mount Golgotha into an ecclesiastical setting, in particular the choir of a church. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the popularity of this 'incarnational' device.

What I want to focus on is the immediate ambience of the Crucifixion scene in altarpieces such as the Passion retable in the St. Jans-Cathedral in 's-Hertogenbosch, which was produced in Antwerp ca. 1510–20.¹⁴ In Bosch's own time this retable was located in the small village of Oploo, not far from his hometown; it epitomizes the kind of 'mass produced' altarpieces with which he was surely familiar. A scenic Crucifixion with many figures gathered at the foot of Mount Golgotha takes up the center of the shrine. The figures of the three crucified men tower high above the crowd, surrounded by a rhythmic pattern of gilded, baldachin-shaped openwork tracery. It may not strike modern eyes as a significant detail, but an architectural setting with tracery windows serves as a backdrop to the Crucifixion—suggesting that the Crucifixion, along with Mount Golgotha, is located in an interior church setting. One might argue that the architectural detail visually dwindles behind the dense tracery hanging over and framing the figures of the crucified men, and that as a consequence this decorative setting reduces much of the backdrop's denotative specificity as a church interior. The ecclesiastical setting is much more evident in a Passion retable in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon (ca. 1510/20) [Fig. 14.8].¹⁵ The solidity and compactness of the crowded Calvary scene, which even includes an entire cityscape of Jerusalem in the background, contrasts with the transparent window tracery behind the Crucifixion, which unmistakably evokes the interior of a late-Gothic church (a setting that is repeated in the other compartments of the retable). The retable in the Prieuré d'Ambierle (St. Martin Church, 1466) situates Mount Calvary in the choir of a Gothic church [Fig. 14.9].¹⁶ The Crucifixion group is placed near the back of a niche, the lower part of which consists of a plain wall, while the upper part shows a frieze of

14 See Nieuwdorp H. et alii, *Antwerpse retabels, 15de–16de eeuw* [exh. cat., Museum voor Religieuze Kunst, Antwerp] (Antwerp: 1993) 52–57.

15 Ibidem 36–39.

16 De Vrij M.R., "Vrancke van der Stockt en het retabel van Ambierle", *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1998) 209–231; Jacobs L.F., *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380–1550: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (Cambridge: 1998) 27, 38, 40, 76, 102–103, 155, 195–196.



FIGURE 14.8 *Anonymous, "Crucifixion," interior of Passion Retable (ca. 1510–1520). Polychromed wood, 227 × 230 × 32 cm. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Detail.*

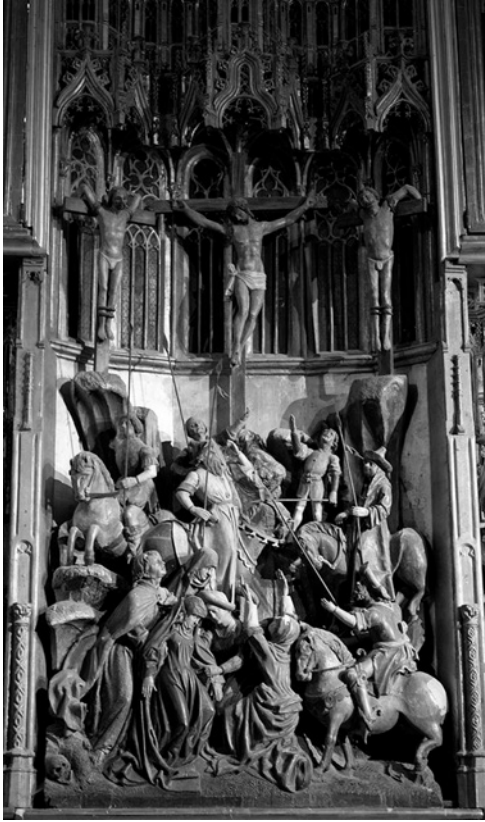


FIGURE 14.9

Rogier van der Weyden (follower), "Mount Calvary," interior of Passion Retable (1466). Polychromed wood (oil on wood, side panels), 560 × 140 cm, Ambierle, St. Martin Church. Detail.

glazed tracery windows. The figures of the crucified men rise high above the rest of the Calvary figures, creating the impression that their bodies form more of a spatial and visual unity with the glazed tracery work behind them than with the soldiers and mourners below them. This tracery, moreover, opens the figures to a certain degree of lighting from the back, and establishes a spatial connection with the real choir behind the altarpiece. The three pendant baldachins marking Christ and the other two crucified men not only physically connect the (actually very shallow) choir space to the inner posts of the retable, but also visually conflate with the tracery pattern of the choir windows. These interlocking framing devices (notice also the crucifiers and mourners below the Cross who act out their respective roles with expressive gestures and features) give the over-all impression that the Crucifixion is staged as a real event in the choir of the retable and, by extension, in the real choir, where it takes place atop the altar where the priest performs the Eucharistic rite.

The entire altarpiece thus becomes a multi-layered framework—a 'theatrical incarnation machine'—that bridges the representational world and the

real world in both its physical and metaphysical dimensions. This is achieved by sculptural and pictorial means, which in their intended functionality are very similar to the ones explored and employed by Hieronymus Bosch. Both here and there the frame becomes an aesthetic *locus* in its own right, where distinctions between *res* and *signum* break down (as if in a pictorial 'rite of passage'). In turn, this effect of indeterminacy fosters an illusion of conflation, connecting or, better, eliding the representational, physical, and metaphysical registers of the altarpiece. The exploration of such 'border cases' should by no means be limited to the few examples mentioned here. Many retables of the period—some created by the most famous and innovative sculptors of their time—give even greater weight to the frame as a field of interconnectivity that takes on a life of its own:¹⁷ one such example is Tilman Riemenschneider's *Corpus Christi Altar* for the Herrgottskirche in Creglingen [Fig. 14.10]; another is his *Holy Blood Altar* in Rothenburg ob der Tauber.¹⁸ In both works the rear wall of the center part of the altarpiece has become entirely open to the light and space of choir behind it, resulting in the illusion of a continuum of real world, representational realm, Eucharistic ritual and divine presence. At the same time, especially in the towering *Gespränge*, the decorative superstructure that rises high above and beyond the main body of the shrine, the frame dissolves into a filigree-like maze stretching its foliage-like tentacles—almost as if it were a living being—far into the surrounding church space. Such 'animated' frames enliven, in a literal and figurative sense, the retable as a whole, emphasizing the 'eventness' of the central scene: everything underscores the *presentia realis* of Christ in the Eucharist. The multi-faceted surface structure (two- and three-dimensional at the same time) would have helped to create moments during which believers may have thought they could see the divine protagonists at the center of the retable 'really' coming alive; the volatile light cast by the flickering candles on the altar would have intensified this effect. Such an illusion may have been particularly poignant for viewers habituated to meditating on the Stations of the Cross as a way of following step by step the ritual acts of the priest-celebrant. This kind of devotion was explicitly advocated in contemporary meditative manuals focusing on the Eucharist, in which lay people were advised to imagine themselves present at the Passion and—concurrent with

17 Cf. Hecht C., "Das Bild am Altar: Altarbild – Einsatzbild und Rahmenbild – Vorsatzbild", in Körner H. – Möseneder K. (eds.), *Format und Rahmen. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: 2008) 132: '[...] ja man darf wohl die Geschichte des Altarretabels als eine Sonderform der Geschichte des Bildrahmens ansehen'.

18 See Kahsnitz R., *Carved Altarpieces: Masterpieces of the Late Gothic* (London: 2006) 222–253.

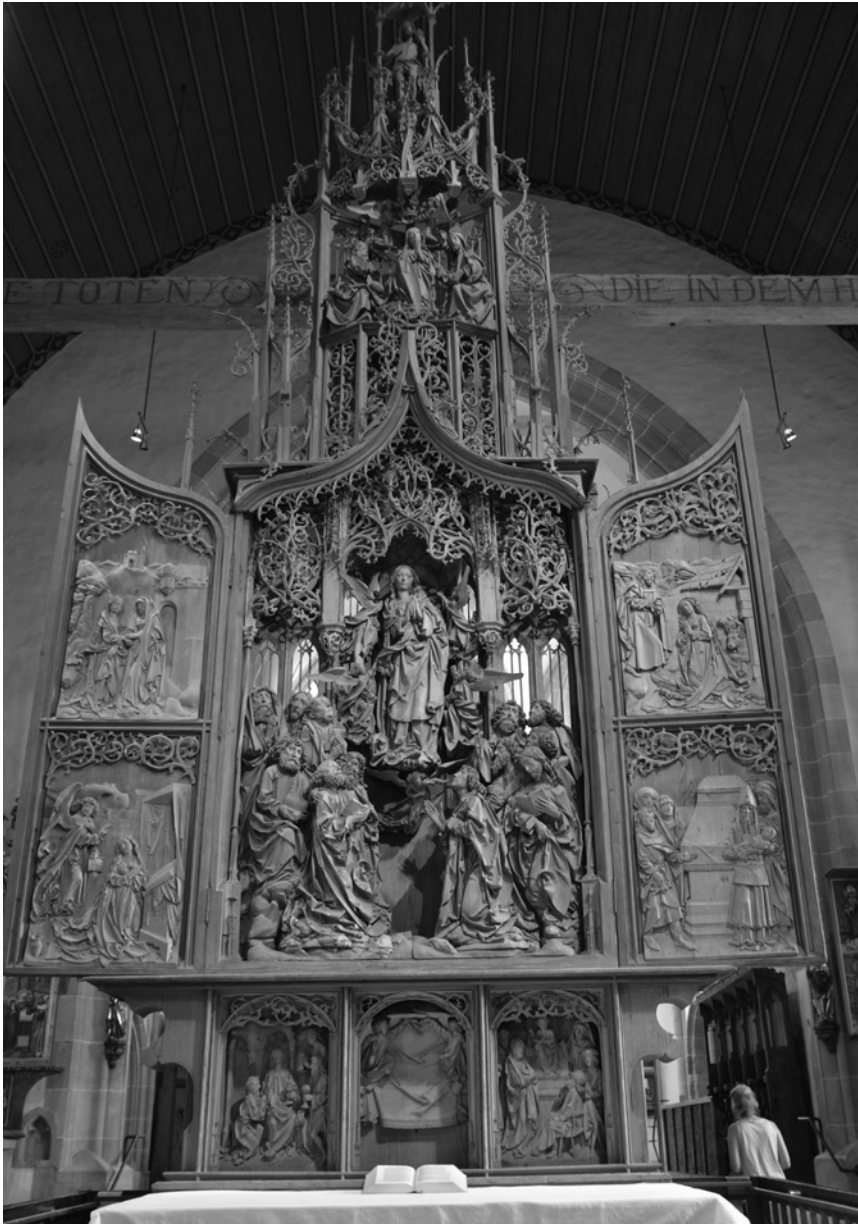


FIGURE 14.10 *Tilman Riemenschneider, Corpus Christi Altar (1505–1510). Wood (fir; lime-wood), 930 × 373 cm. Creglingen, Herrgottskirche.*

the *elevatio* of the consecrated Host by the priest—‘seeing’ Christ suffering on the Cross before their inner eye.¹⁹ Research by Jeffrey Hamburger and Walter Melion, among others, has shown how much exposure to, and visual engagement with, physical images was expected to enhance and enrich such meditative efforts of the (outer and) inner eye.²⁰ All this speaks to an inextricably multi-medial, multi-dimensional, and multi-sensorial interconnectedness and interpenetration of representation, suggested space, actual space, Eucharistic ritual, and ‘living presence’ of the divine, in the eye of the believer.

It would seem that Bosch’s exceptional framing device of a ‘real’ Crucifixion on top of St Gregory’s retable served to promote this *suggestion* of animation. It may be helpful once again to draw a parallel between this invention and the way contemporary carved altarpieces situate the figure of the Crucified at the very top of the retable. In particular, in Southern Germany one still finds many retables with extremely airy openwork *Gespränge*, in which relatively large sculpted figures are sometimes entangled, like spiders in a web. Often a figure of the Man of Sorrows, or Christ hanging on the Cross, is woven into the pinnacle of the structure, such as in Jörg Syrlin’s design drawing for the lost high altar for the Münster in Ulm (1474), the high altar of the parish church of St. Jakob in Rothenburg ob der Tauber (ca. 1466), the high altar of the Kilianskirche in Heilbronn (1498), the high altar of the St. Jakob church in Rabenden (ca. 1510–15), the high altar of the St. Ursula church in Oberndorf (ca. 1510), or, closer to Bosch’s home, Heinrich Douvermann’s *Altar of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin* in the St. Nikolai church in Kalkar (1518–1521/22).²¹ Bosch

19 Cf. Smits Van Waesberghe, “Iets over de leer”; Browe P., *Die Verehrung der Eucharistie im Mittelalter* (Munich: 1933; reprint ed., Freiburg i. B.: 1967) 53, 55–58; Caspers C.M.A., *De eucharistische vroomheid en het feest van Sacramentsdag in de Nederlanden tijdens de Late Middeleeuwen*, Miscellanea Neerlandica v (Leuven: 1992).

20 See, for example, Hamburger J., *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: 1998); Melion W., “The Art of Vision in Jerome Nadal’s *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*”, in *Jerome Nadal, Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels. Volume 1: The Infancy Narratives*, ed.-trans. F.A. Homann (Philadelphia: 2003) 1–96; and idem, “Meditative Images and the Portrayal of Image-Based Meditation”, in Melion W.S. – Dekoninck R. – Guiderdoni- Bruslé (eds.), *Ut pictura meditatio: The Meditative Image in Northern Art, 1500–1700*, *Lovis Corinth Colloquia* II (Turnhout: 2012) 1–60.

21 See Kahsnitz, *Carved Altarpieces* 23 (fig. 25); 58–75; 28–29 (fig. 32); 32 (fig. 37) and 36; 32–33 (fig. 38); 36 (fig. 41); and Werd G. de, *St. Nicolaikirche Kalkar* (Munich – Berlin: 2002) 91–99. Kahsnitz, *Carved Altarpieces* 34, identifies the high altar of the parish church in St. Sigmund, Tirol (ca. 1430), as the oldest extant example, i.e., as an early form of the retable type with a large superstructure, which dominated production in central and eastern Europe from the later fifteenth to the sixteenth century. See, however, in addition to Douvermann’s retable in Kalkar, Hans Brüggemann’s high altarpiece for St. Peter’s

cannot have seen the latter, since he died in 1516, and it is unknown if the retable made by Adriaen van Wesel, for which Bosch painted the wings, contained an openwork superstructure that might have resembled the examples mentioned here. There are estimates that only a small portion of late-medieval carved altarpieces survived iconoclasm, baroquification, or the ravages of time in general; it is therefore difficult precisely to determine where Bosch may have seen retables topped by superstructures with Crucifixion figures woven into their filigree. I believe, however, that his invention of the 'live' Crucifixion that overtops as well as enframes Gregory's retable—thereby endowing the space around the saint's altar with the salvific aura of the historical Crucifixion enacted in the here and now—was inspired by such formations of 'animated' *Gespränge*.

Some years ago, in a survey of theologically-based theories of the (ideal) relationship between the medieval believer and the divine or holy person he or she venerates or adores by way of an image of that person, Jean Wirth offered a series of illuminating diagrams that represent this relationship from the perspective of various theologians.²² These thirteen (!) different diagrams have in common an arrow that extends from the believer (in monastic attire) kneeling before an image of Christ enthroned (also meant as a stand-in image for divine and holy persons in general). Directed at the divine person, the arrow passes through, 'stays at', or transcends the image, leaving it behind; in all cases the arrow represents a movement *from* the viewer *towards* the object or person of veneration or adoration. This survey, meant to clarify the use of images at the threshold of the Reformation, and to explain reactions against the use or 'abuse' of images in the early sixteenth-century, proves to be highly misleading. It suffers from the same misconception about the devotional purpose of images as Erwin Panofsky's evocative formulation that they offer 'dem betrachtenden Einzelbewußtsein die Möglichkeit einer kontemplativen Versenkung in den betrachtenden Inhalt zu geben, d.h. das Subjekt mit dem Objekt seelisch gleichsam verschmelzen zu lassen'.²³ In both cases, the *suggestion of agency*

Cathedral, Schleswig (ibidem 37, fig. 42), completed in 1521, which adapts the high superstructure type to the Antwerp retable type; Kalkar and Schleswig, located respectively in western and northern Germany, are relatively close to 's-Hertogenbosch.

- 22 Wirth J., "Soll man Bilder anbeten? Theorien zum Bilderkult bis zum Konzil von Trient", in Dupreux C. – Jezler P. – With J. (eds.) *Bildersturm—Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille?* [exh. cat., Historisches Museum, Bern; Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame, Strassburg] (Zurich: 2000) 28–37.
- 23 Panofsky E., "Imago Pietatis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des 'Schmerzensmannes' und der 'Maria Mediatrix'", in *Festschrift Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: 1927) 264.

lies with the viewer / believer—not with the image, let alone the divine entity.²⁴ There is massive evidence in late-medieval art, however, that paintings and works of sculpture destined to function in liturgical or devotional settings were designed to allow the arrow of the relationship between believer and divine or holy persona, i.e., the arrow of divine revelation and grace, to flow in precisely the opposite direction: from heaven to earth, from God to believer. The viewer, not God, is the ‘receiver’ of what flows in and through the image, and there are many examples of image-rich meditative texts composed in such a way as to suggest that *the image* ‘sich versenkt in den Betrachter’, so to speak. Late-medieval representations of the Mass of St Gregory (many hundreds of them are still extant) are part of this body of evidence—are ‘bodies of evidence’—*pace* medieval theologians and modern art historians.

Bosch’s representation of the theme exemplifies this function of the image as an active agent, transmitting the force of divine emanation to the viewer with subtle pictorial power. The last stage of this inner-pictorial dynamic is represented by two secular viewers, who witness Christ’s manifestation on the altar of St Gregory from nearby. The identity of these attendants is still the subject of discussion, and the question has been raised whether these figures were planned from the very start, or whether they are a later addition.²⁵ There is indeed something awkward in their placement in the painting. The oldest of the two, a man in a black gown resembling a magistrate or high administrator (probably identifiable with Peeter de Gramme), is kneeling close by at left, beside the altar. This position is sometimes given to a donor,²⁶ but in most cases it is occupied by clerics assisting Gregory in the Eucharistic ritual.²⁷ On the right, farther from the altar, is a younger man (a boy, it seems) in similar gown, kneeling on a ledge that separates the slightly elevated pediment of the altar from the rest of the church floor. The position of the boy (probably Jan Scheyfve), is spatially somewhat ambiguous. This is partly due to the fact

24 On the agency of images, see, for example, Gell A., *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: 1998; reprint ed., Oxford: 2010).

25 Koreny, *Hieronymus Bosch* 35–54, esp. 44–53. For the most convincing effort up to now to identify the patrons of the interior and the exterior (i.e., Peeter de Gramme and Jan Scheyfve, respectively), see Duquenne, “Peeter Scheyfve et Agnès de Gramme”.

26 Cf., for example, Meier, *Die Gregorsmesse*, Taf. 45.

27 This could indicate that Peeter de Gramme was part of, or close to, the inner circles (the sworn ‘Zwanenbroeders’) of the *Onze Lieve Vrouwebroederschap*, which, in Hieronymus Bosch’s time, was very much devoted to the Mass and the Eucharist. Cf. Van Dijk G.C.M., *De Bossche Optimaten. Geschiedenis van de Illustere Lieve Vrouwebroederschap te ‘s-Hertogenbosch*, 1318–1973 (Tilburg: 1973), esp. 195–241; also see Caspers, *De eucharistische vroomheid*.

that he has been strictly rendered in profile; his over-all size moreover, seems too small compared to the other figures surrounding the altar. The hem of his gown, which falls just over the ledge on which he kneels, makes his spatial position more easily definable. His red cap, like the true-to-life colors with which both men, especially their faces, have been rendered, stands out against the monochrome yellowish tone of the rest of their environment. The men are therefore portrayed (also spatially) as close witnesses of Christ's visionary appearance on Gregory's altar, but coloristically, i.e., 'in real life,' separated from the event. Or rather: they form a bridge between the visionary event represented in and on the painted (i.e., Gregory's) altar and the *real* altar on which Bosch's triptych will have been placed. The double framing device in the lower part of the triptych, which echoes the ambiguous play with the representational and material identity of the frame and the upper part of the Gregory's retable, seems to serve the same purpose of bridging the pictorial and the real world. The outer contours of the wooden frame surrounding the triptych in its closed state are reiterated on the inside by a painted frame, executed in a slightly lighter greyish tone. The latter is painted over the two adjacent bars of the real frame in the center of the triptych in its closed state, at the bottom and at the top of the retable. By this means, the world or, better, the register of pictorial representation is transferred to that of the real world: what is painted on top of these joint bars (the Man of Sorrows and the Crucifixion on Golgotha) becomes visually / physically present in our real world. The horizontal ledge running parallel to the lower frame(s) of the retable, on which the young man kneels, enhances the complex interconnection between the inner-pictorial realm of Gregory's vision, Christ's (visionary-) bodily appearance, and the altar of the priest celebrating Mass, as a backdrop to which Bosch created this marvel of 'incarnational' art.

If this interpretation *grosso modo* is correct, i.e., if the retable on Gregory's altar radically breaks down the distinction between *signum* and *res*, or rather, if the retable itself—in its representational and physical being—is subject to the transformative dynamic of God's active intervention in this world, then this must also be true for the retable (Bosch's triptych) representing this dynamic. As the unfolding of Christ's presence on Gregory's altar simultaneously occurs in, and on, Bosch's triptych, the painting as a whole is subsumed into this all-encompassing 'super-entanglement' of divine origin.²⁸

28 This formulation is very much indebted to 'entanglement theory' developed by Ian Hodder, which forcefully argues for a recognition of a fundamental human-thing entanglement, and to 'material engagement theory', expounded by Lambros Malafouris, which

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investigates the continuum of the human mind and the material world and the way the first is formed by the latter. See Hodder I., *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationship between Humans and Things* (Malden: 2012); and Malafouris L., *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*, (Cambridge, MA – London: 2013). I understand ‘super-entanglement’ to comprise not only the human mind / body and the physical world, but also the metaphysical world.

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The Mystery of the Incarnation and the Art of Painting

Dalia Judovitz

Georges de La Tour's (1593–1652) iconic painting *The Newborn Child* has enjoyed an unusual and contradictory reception, one which nonetheless exemplifies the problems attendant upon his works as a whole [Fig. 15.1]. Unusual because, until his rediscovery by Hermann Voss (1884–1969) in 1915, La Tour's paintings were not recognized as his own, having been misattributed to other Dutch or French seventeenth-century painters, and contradictory due to the diametrically opposite reactions elicited by his works. Impressed by the painting's 'sublimity' even while mistakenly attributing it to the Le Nain brothers, Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) described this work as two peasant women looking at an eight day-old child sleeping. Taine was captivated by the realism of La Tour's depiction, which so accurately captured the origins of human life: 'All that Physiology can say about the beginnings of a human being is there.'¹ However, this secular, almost scientific interpretation of the scene stands in marked contrast with the sense of wonder and mystery that Louis Gonse expressed in 1900 at the spiritual connotations of this work when seen as a nativity scene:

Do you know Le Nain? Are you aware of the strange and delicious painting at the Rennes museum, this Nativity drowned in shadows, where humble, tender and sweet silhouettes are illuminated by the reflections of such a mysterious light? This work haunts me. Each time I came back to Rennes, it charmed me all the more. It is a marvel of sentiment, candor and originality.²

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- 1 Taine first identified *The Newborn Child* as a Dutch painting, before misattributing it to the Le Nain brothers. For his comments, see Taine H., *Carnets de Voyage. Notes sur la Province* (Paris: 1896), quoted in Rosenberg P., "The Glory of Georges de La Tour," in Merlini V. – Storti D. – Salmon D. (eds.), *Georges de La Tour in Milan: The Adoration of the Shepherds, Christ with Saint Joseph in the Carpenter's Shop* (Milan: 2011) 24.
 - 2 Gonse L., *Les chefs d'œuvres des musées de France : La Peinture* (Paris: 1900), abridged quoted in Cuzin P. – Salmon D. (eds.), *Georges de la Tour: Histoire d'une redécouverte* (Paris: 2004) 149; my translation.



FIGURE 15.1 *Georges de La Tour, The Newborn Child (ca. 1645). Oil on canvas, 76 × 91 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes.*

Gonse's reaction revealed the painting's ambiguous status as it moves between intimations of the secular and the sacred. The representation of light is imbued with mystery, since it acts both to reveal and to hide the meaning of the scene. The painting confounds the beholder since it offers two incompatible visions in one image: an ordinary depiction of maternity and birth in an agrarian world and a Nativity scene representing the divine mystery of Christ's conception and birth.

La Tour's depiction marks a radical departure from the traditions of religious painting, including even its most iconoclastic practitioners such as Caravaggio, since no sacred subjects are overtly designated as such (with the exception of his painting of St. Jerome with a halo). As Benedict Nicolson and Christopher Wright have noted, 'La Tour keeps down the attributes of the Saints to a minimum, so persistently that confusion has resulted as to the nature of his subject matter. There has been no halo in a La Tour since the Grenoble *St. Jerome*: he will shun the obvious label!'.³ It is important to keep in mind that Caravaggio's

3 Nicolson B. – Wright C. (eds.), *Georges de La Tour* (London: 1974) 52.

naturalistic depiction of sacred subjects, in his *Penitent Magdalene* (ca. 1597; Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome) for instance, was perceived as flaunting pictorial conventions since it showed Mary Magdalene as a young girl engaged in the prosaic activity of drying her hair, rather than as an idealized figure. Despite the painting's ostensible naturalism, however, Caravaggio still retained the indices of the sacred by depicting the Magdalene's jewels and jar of ointment as identifying markers of the saint's identity. In La Tour's *Newborn Child*, the absence of these iconographic conventions undermines the beholder's ability clearly to identify this work as an instance of secular or sacred painting. Does this work depict a genre scene, or is it a nativity scene that would celebrate the mystery of the incarnation? The painting's ambiguous visual appearance is puzzling and raises fundamental questions about La Tour's depiction of the sacred and the nature of visual images as instruments of devotion. Indeed, it compels us to ask how ordinary appearance may serve as a vehicle for the sacred—that is, how the visible image may lend itself to the promotion of contemplative devotion and the attainment of spiritual insight.

While the biographical data is scant at best in providing information about La Tour's life and artistic education, scholars have consistently recognized the influence of the Council of Trent and the debates that followed in the context of the Catholic Reform on the development of La Tour's pictorial approach.⁴ This influence became manifest in the attempts not just to redefine the content and figures of devotion but also to rethink the nature and function of the pictorial medium in promoting spiritual insight. As Alexander Nagel noted, these reformist trends in religious practice 'drew emphasis away from the objective power of the sacraments and toward the spiritual experience of the believer', leading to the emergence of new forms of viewer response.⁵ What is the impact of these concerns regarding the visual nature of the image as a vehicle for the sacred on La Tour's interrogations of painting? And do they also enable a meta-reflection on the conditions of possibility of painting that would

4 A regional painter in the duchy of Lorraine who gained significant recognition in his time, La Tour was ignored by posterity until his rediscovery by Hermann Voss in 1915. A few extant official documents and letters attest to the fact that although he was the son of a baker of some means, he was able to attain, through his artistic talents and marriage, a comfortable position as a burgher and property owner in Lunéville. He was eventually awarded royal patronage and a pension by King Louis XIII. For descriptive summaries of these documents, see Thuillier J., *Georges de La Tour* (Paris: 1993) 296–297. For a comprehensive account of La Tour's rediscovery and re-attribution of his works, see Salmon D., "The Invention of Georges de La Tour or the Major Phases of his Resurrection", in Merlini – Storti – Salmon, *Georges de La Tour in Milan* 37–62.

5 Nagel A., "Fashion and the Now-Time of Renaissance Art", *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46 (2004) 52.

include a revaluation of the beholder's position and possibilities of engagement? Two of La Tour's nocturnes will be discussed, *The Newborn Child* and *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. La Tour's treatment of light and shadows will be interpreted as a reflection on painting's spiritual aspirations to proffer a figuration of the Incarnation (of the Word made flesh). But this represents no easy task, for as Mario Valenti aptly noted, 'the mystery of the divine Incarnation [...] represents a real challenge to the language of painting, since it tests the enunciative and theoretical abilities of painting itself beyond a single artist's mere creative abilities'.⁶ This essay examines how La Tour's representation of the mystery of the Incarnation understood as the Word become flesh (*Verbum caro factum est*; *John* 1), implying the union of divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ, challenged the visual and representational scope of painting.⁷ It also proposes to show that by testing the language of painting and its theoretical abilities, La Tour's pictorial meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation enables a meta-reflection on the conditions of possibility of painting as a medium that abides in the visible. At issue throughout this essay will be intersections of word and image insofar as they enable both a critique and a new understanding of vision, the visible and the art of painting.

La Tour's nocturnes are imbued with the language of light derived from the *Gospel of St. John*, which presents God as the principle of life which acts as the light of men: 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not [...]. That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world' (*John* 1:4–5 & 9).⁸ Although equated with light and enlightenment, this divine principle of creation figures the priority of the Word, not as utterance but as divine Logos: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (*John* 1:1). The Incarnation is presented not as an unfolding narrative but as an event whose mystery withholds itself from figuration and resists representation: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full

6 Valenti M., "Light and Shadow: Painting the Incarnation Mystery (Notes on Orazio Gentileschi's Annunciation)", *Semiotica* 136, 1/4 (2001) 419.

7 See "Incarnation" entry in Pons-Augustin Alletz, *Dictionnaire Théologique-Portatif: Contenant L'Exposition et les Preuves de la Révélation* (Paris: 1756) 305–308. All biblical quotations will be referring to *The King James Version of the Bible*, followed by chapter and verse.

8 For a comprehensive study of La Tour's nocturnes in terms of night and shadows and the emblematic associations that subtend them, see Choné P., "L'Académie de la nuit: Louange et science de l'ombre au XVII^e siècle", in Choné P. – Boyer J. – Spear R. – Lavin I. (eds.), *L'Âge d'or du nocturne* (Paris: 2001) 17–61.

of grace and truth' (*John* 1:14). This event articulates but it does not explain: it merely marks the crossing of the divine Word or light into the world.⁹ Whereas Luke represents the mystery of the Incarnation by narrating Mary's visitation by an angel and her 'overshadowing' by the Holy Spirit, John marks the event of the Word become flesh, an event whose spiritual glory withholds its mystery from visual access or inspection.

La Tour's attempts to figure the Incarnation are also informed by St. Luke's account in the Gospels. While John relies on light to figure God's agency and creative potency (since 'All things were made by him,' *John* 1:3), St. Luke evokes the effects of light and its generative capacity in producing shadows. By comparison, St. Matthew simply concludes that Mary 'was found with the child of the Holy Ghost' (*Matthew* 1:18), an account that leaves the Incarnation altogether out of the picture. Luke's narrative of the Incarnation is based on the angel Gabriel's visitation of the Virgin Mary and her reaction and response. Gabriel's salutation affirmed that Mary, in conceiving and bringing forth a son, had been supremely blessed and favored by God. Responding to Mary's perturbation at the news of her conception, given her virginal status, Gabriel explained: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee ("Virtus altissimi obumbravit tibi")' (*Luke* 1: 35). Thus the language of light and illumination that pervades the *Gospel of St. John* stands in contrast to St. Luke's account of the generative power of the Holy Spirit to produce or cast shadows, that is, to 'overshadow'. He figures the Incarnation in terms of the Holy Spirit's power to cast its influence like a shadow, thus attesting by analogy to the generative power of light.

Originally attributed to Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656), La Tour's *Adoration of the Shepherds* is now believed to be the *Nativity of Our Savior* commissioned by the municipality of Lunéville and delivered to the governor of Lorraine, Henri II de Sennenterre (also known as the Maréchal de La Ferté), in January, 1645 [Fig. 15.2]. Bought by the Louvre in 1926, this iconic work has become 'France's most celebrated Nativity'.¹⁰ Let us more closely examine La Tour's use of light, its spiritual connotations and physical manifestations in this work. The painting shows an old man holding a partially occluded candle that illuminates the scene, but this light is insufficient to account for the child's radiance which functions as a source of light in its own right. La Tour's

9 Cf. Louis Marin's formulation of conversion as an event in Marin L., *Echographies. Les traversées d'une conversion*, *Lectures traversières* (Paris: 1992) 304–305.

10 See Cuzin – Salmon, *Georges de La Tour* 22, and also Conisbee P., "An Introduction to the Life and Art of Georges de La Tour", in idem (ed.), *Georges de La Tour and His World* (Washington, D.C.: 1996) 120.



FIGURE 15.2 Georges de La Tour, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (ca. 1645). Oil on canvas, 131 × 107 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

depiction of these two sources of light is anomalous, since earlier pictorial traditions represented the Christ child as the ‘sole source of light’ given his exalted status as ‘spiritual light of the world.’¹¹ La Tour’s use of night and light also reflects the influence of emblem books that were used to illustrate and propagate scriptural passages.¹² In his emblem book, *Della selva di concetti scritturali* (*The Forest of Scriptural Concepts*) (Venice, Barezzi Barezzi – Gioseffo Peluso: 1594, 1600), Giulio Cesare Capaccio’s comments on night and light from a spiritual perspective help us understand La Tour’s use of light imagery. Reprising a longstanding tradition, Capaccio distinguished between two forms of light:

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- 11 Conisbee, “Introduction to the Life and Art of George de La Tour” 121. Both Correggio’s *Adoration of the Shepherds*, also known as “*La Notte*” (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) and Philippe de Champaigne’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1645, The Wallace Collection), which is contemporaneous with La Tour’s painting, visibly show the Christ child as a source of light.
- 12 See Paulette Choné’s influential study, *Emblèmes et pensée symbolique en Lorraine (1525–1633)*. *Comme un jardin au cœur de la chrétienté* (Paris: 1991).

lux, luce, which is divine, eternal, hidden and occult, and lumen, lume, which is natural light that is visually manifest: 'Now you see two kinds of light, the first occult in the inspiration of the spirit, which also signified the light of the soul, the light that is enveloped in this lantern of the body; manifest light is that of the devil, which does not make known that immortal life'.¹³ Accordingly, the partially covered candle in La Tour's *Adoration of the Shepherds* signifies the divine light which is occulted, thus figuring the Incarnation understood as the light of the soul 'enveloped in the lantern of the body'. These analogies of Christ with a lantern or lamp reflect his worldly condition: Christ's body hides his divinity because the nature of God is not perceptible with corporeal eyes.¹⁴ The painting refers explicitly to the discrepancy between a visual and a spiritual way of seeing that implies seeing the light inwardly rather than externally (*John* 20:29). The candle's function as a physical source of light is overshadowed by the radiance of the newborn, who, rather than abiding in the reflections of candlelight, acts as a lamp that exudes its own light. The painting's spiritual function as an instrument of devotion is distinguished from its descriptive function as a record of the physical manifestations of light, casting painting's visual language and illusionism into doubt. Like Cappacio, La Tour warns the beholder against painting's propensity to deceive and even betray its spiritual mission, given its dependence on images whose visually seductive properties rely on a physical understanding of light and vision.

Further examination of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* reveals La Tour's attempts to distinguish between spiritual and physical illumination, for though bathed in the same light, the figures surrounding the child are surprisingly illuminated in different ways. Notably, the shepherd at the rear holding a flute is encompassed by the ambient penumbra and reduced almost to a specter, whereas the woman's face next to him is illuminated by reflected light. Such inconsistency is physically inexplicable and pictorially implausible unless one considers the possibility that these reflections point to states of spiritual enlightenment. The reddish glow on Mary's face reflects the radiance of light understood not as simple material semblance but as spiritual illumination: 'Thus God is truly in all things, though invisible. [...] Indeed, we may well speak of the fire of charity, or the fire of the Holy Spirit, and especially of the

13 On Cappacio's text, see the discussion in Lavin I., "Georges de La Tour: The Tears of St. Peter and the 'Occult' Light of Penitence", in Seidel M. (ed.), *L'Europa e l'arte italiana* (Venice: 2001) 364–367. This passage is quoted in Choné.

14 For metaphors of Christ's body as a lantern or lamp, see Lavin, "Georges de La Tour: The Tears of St. Peter" 369.

fire of divine love [...].¹⁵ This radiance figures what is otherwise unavailable to vision, that is, the inner light of spiritual conviction that reflects the affective tenor of her heart. As the color of fire, the red hue makes expressively manifest the presence of the spirit ('pneuma'), whose flame and fiery nature signify the inner light of spiritual passion.¹⁶ The spiritual connotations implicit in the color red also relate to the description of the Virgin's red mantle as 'a garden of roses'. In the early patristic tradition, Christ is often spoken of as a light or a fire which the Virgin received and bore.¹⁷

The Language of Shadows

In addition to St. John's language of light, La Tour also relies on St. Luke's evocation of shadows to characterize the mystery of the Incarnation. How can the painter show the shadow cast by the angel's radiant message, 'the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee' ("Virtus altissimi obumbravit tibi")' (*Luke* 1:35)? Sir Thomas Brown privileged the notion of overshadowing as central to the mystery of the Incarnation: 'The greatest mystery of Religion is expressed by adumbration'.¹⁸ Luke's appeal to the notion of overshadowing refers to key scriptural passages in the Old Testament which name God as the power on high hovering over the waters of the world in the process of creation: 'And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water' (*Genesis* 1:1–2), followed by his fiat: 'Let there be Light'. Luke reprised God's creative potency as represented in Genesis: a moving force that preceded the existence of shadows or images, which were brought into being with the birth of light.¹⁹ Designated by 'overshadowing', St. Luke's mysterious description of the Incarnation thus emerges as a moment of creation that coincides with the birth of images and

15 Berchorius P. "Reductorium morale", in *Opera Omnia* (Antwerp, Apud Ioannem Keerbergium: 1609) Bk. VI, Chap. 4.

16 See Patrik Reuterswärd's discussion of the color red and its angelic connotations in "What Color is Divine Light", in Hess T. – Ashberry J. (eds.), *Light from Aten to Laser* (New York: 1969) 120–121.

17 See the writings of the early church fathers, St. Epiphanius, St. Fulgentius and St. Ephrem, as quoted respectively in Livius T., *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London: 1923) 128, 138, 407 and 426.

18 Brown Thomas, *Cyrus-Garden or the Quincunx Mistically Considered* (London, Hen. Brome: 1658), Chap. 3; quoted in Gage, J. *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Berkeley: 1999) 122.

19 Or as St. Paul noted, 'whatsoever doth make manifest is light' (*Ephesians* 5:14).

thus the possibility of painting (which relies upon effects of light and shadow).²⁰ Victor Stoichita has noted that Luke's formulation of God's creative potency in terms of Mary's 'overshadowing' ('episkiazein', in the original Greek) partially translates the now archaic meaning of an eastern, Semitic expression which referred to the magical and therapeutic powers of shadow as figured by its inseminatory power (resulting in Mary's pregnancy), its powers of protection (as when someone is taken under one's shadow) and its power to heal (a reference to the curative effects of Peter's shadow in *Acts* 5:15–16).²¹

A closer look at La Tour's depiction of shadows in *The Adoration of the Shepherds* reveals multiple references to the spiritual mystery of the Incarnation understood in Luke's terms as 'overshadowing', along with an implied reflection on painting conceived as an art of shadows. The most visually striking is the shadow cast by the Virgin's hands crossed in prayer on her robe. This feathery shadow serves multiple purposes, bearing witness to different modes of representation and being. It marks the presence of the spiritual while it also alludes to the physical and to the pictorial use of light and shadows. The shadow of her crossed fingers recalls the flutter of bird wings and inscribes allusions to a dove, thereby figuring the Holy Spirit and pointing to the Trinity and the Incarnation: 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove [...]' (*John* 1:32).²² The shadow cast by her fingers crossed in prayer serves to render visible the intensity of her spiritual conviction, but in doing so, it also alludes to a secular understanding of painting as an art of depicted shadows.

Further references to the Incarnation and the Trinity are introduced by the presence of the lamb by her side delicately nibbling on some trefoil sprigs that line Christ's crib.²³ La Tour's apparent concession to pictorial naturalism here

20 The other Old Testament passage that Luke reprises is that of the completion of the tabernacle, when Yahveh descends in a cloud that overshadows the tent, implying a prophetic link to the renewal of Jerusalem.

21 For an analysis of the meaning of overshadowing and the history of the shadow, see Stoichita V., *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: 1999) 67–69. The biblical passage is as follows: '[...] so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed' (*Acts* 5:15–16).

22 The dove is a symbol of the Holy Ghost as in the words of St. John, 'I saw the spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting upon him' (*John* 1:32); and in representations of the Annunciation, it can signify the act of conception that took place through the Virgin's ear; see Hall J., *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (Boulder – Oxford: 1979) 109.

23 The lamb was adopted by Christians as a symbol of Christ in his sacrificial role as 'Lamb of God', and in the context of the Nativity scene, it symbolizes purity and Jesus'

is in violation of sacred conventions, since even the straw that lined Christ's crib was an object of veneration as attested to by its inclusion in reliquaries. The lamb refers to the Incarnation as invoked in *John* 1:29, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'; and thus to Jesus' sacrificial destiny and redemptive power. The three shadows cast by the trefoil sprigs onto the surface of Mary's dress provide further clues that point to the trinitary nature of the incarnation. And were we still to doubt the evidence of these indices pointing to the Incarnation, we have only to consider the covered terrine held out as an offering by the woman in the background. The terrine, which is a vessel made of clay, clearly constitutes a reference to God's Incarnation in Christ, whose humanity is like an earthen vessel. But who is this woman holding out the evidence of the Incarnation as literal fact? Is she merely a maid bearing a bowl of milk as scholars have contended? Or do her red vestments marked by golden glimmers of radiance and the criss-crossed lacings on her bodice that spell out a sideways letter "M" suggest the possibility that she is more than the humble bearer of a bowl of milk, that she is herself a kind of living vessel who served to bear the divine, since as St. Anne she would be Mary's mother and Christ's grandmother? A servant bearing a bowl of milk is revealed by allusion to be the bearer of a daughter whose maternity will host and welcome the divine.

Erased by shadows, the shepherd in the back bearing a flute appears to be tipping or lifting his hat as a sign of recognition and in homage to the sacred nature of the newborn. His gesture of admiration announces as well as stands for the propagation of the news of Christ's birth, while also serving as a metaphor for the caring and loving Christ who would protect and provide for the great flock of his followers, as in the parable of the Good Shepherd from the *Gospel of John*. The hand and body of St. Joseph at right are likewise largely hidden by shadow, alluding to his position as 'shadow' of God the Father, who was charged with keeping Christ hidden and safe until his sacred mission had been publicly revealed.²⁴ Thus, while bereft at first sight of manifestly sacred indices or symbols, this ordinary scene turns out to be redolent of Scripture, as well as consonant with the imagery of emblem books, and consequently,

destiny as the ultimate sacrificial offering; see Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* 185–186.

24 See remarks by Carolyn C. Wilson in "Georges de La Tour's Two Saint Josephs: Theology, Veneration, and Connections with Renaissance Italy", in Merlini – Storti – Salmon (eds.), *Georges de La Tour and The Adoration of the Shepherds* 105, and Joseph F. Chorprenning in "The Enigma of St. Joseph in Poussin's Holy Family on the Steps", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 60 (1997) 276–281.

may be seen as a profound meditation on the sacred. Scriptural and verbal considerations inform the image, helping to cast new light on the painting's visual meaning.

In addition to functioning as a meditation on the spiritual mystery of the Incarnation, La Tour's use of shadows in *The Adoration of the Shepherds* also invite reflection on the status of painting as an art of shadows. Considered in physical terms, the shadow of Mary's hands crossed in prayer (like other shadows in the painting) also functions as a reference to the operations of painting. The hand's shadow embeds an allusion to the making of the painting as well as to the pictorial medium as a sphere of manifestation (a word whose etymology reflects the centrality of the hand, 'manus', in Latin). By depicting the production and projection of shadows in candlelight, the painting stages and illustrates its powers of incarnation as a visual medium. Indeed, not only does this work allude to the representational power of painting insofar as it entails the generation of images; it also re-enacts and performs the legendary origins of painting, namely its genesis from the outlines of shadows. In his *Natural History* (ca. 77–79 AD), Pliny the Elder assigned the origins of painting to the Greeks, recalling that it supposedly originated in 'tracing lines round the human shadow ('omnes umbra hominis lineis circumducta')'.²⁵ Subsequently he reprised this idea in the by now legendary story of Butades of Corinth: 'It was through his daughter that he made the discovery; who, being deeply in love with a young man about to depart on a long journey, traced the profile of his face, as thrown upon the wall by the light of a lamp ("umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscripsit")'.²⁶ Robert Rosenblum has noted that frequent allusions to this legend can be found throughout the historical and theoretical treatises of the seventeenth century, by Franciscus Junius, André Félibien and Vincente Carducho, among others.²⁷ Pliny's narrative dramatizes the origins of painting by positing the shadow as a device for mnemonic recall (given its mimetic capacities) and calling attention to its creative potential insofar as the making of shadows announces the advent of painting. La Tour's depiction of shadows in his nocturnes reprises this popular legend that enjoyed wide circulation during the seventeenth century, in order

25 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (ca. 77–79 AD), Book xxxv, Ch. 5; available in Latin and English translation at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0138:toc&redirect=true>.

26 Pliny, *Natural History*, Book xxxv, Ch. 15.

27 Rosenblum R., "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism", *The Art Bulletin* 39, 4 (1957) 279–280.

to allude analogically to painting's incarnational potential in both spiritual and secular terms.

La Tour's exploration of painting's ability to create visual semblance through the manipulation of light and shadows reveals something fundamental about painting as a medium of incarnation. The touches of reflected light on the terrine and in the shimmer and glimmer of fabrics glowing like embers against the red robes mark the painter's virtuosity, a celebration of painting's attainments, while also inviting reflection on its limits as a visual medium. By depicting the glowing reflections of the candlelight, La Tour turns the terrine and the shining fabrics into a mirror that refers to the operations of painting, thus highlighting its capacity for representation. However, while ostensibly celebrating the lure of the visible, these passing reflections also serve to remind the beholder of its fugitive and perishable character. La Tour's pictorial approach attests to a double strategy at work. On the one hand, deliberate displays of painterly virtuosity serve to illustrate and render visible the seductive power of painting as a visual medium, and on the other hand, the denunciation and ultimate renunciation of this celebratory display serves to convey La Tour's critique of vision and the vanity of painting.

Light and the Art of Painting

Millard Meiss, in a classic article, pointed to a longstanding tradition of theologians and poets who explained the mystery of the Incarnation by analogy to the passage of sunlight through a glass window: 'Just as the brilliance of the sun fills and penetrates a glass window without damaging it, and pierces its solid form with imperceptible subtlety, neither hurting it when entering nor destroying it when emerging: thus the word of God, the splendor of the Father, entered the virgin chamber and then came forth from the closed womb'.²⁸ St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) compared the Virgin to a window pane through which the light that figures the Word of God or the Holy Spirit passes into the earthly realm of the flesh, tracing the passage of the invisible into the visible. He reprised this analogy by reference to stained glass, specifying that just as a pure ray of light enters a window and remains unspoiled even while taking on the color of the glass, so the Son of God 'emerged pure, but took on

28 Meiss M., "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings", *The Art Bulletin* 27,3 (1945) 176; St. Bernard is quoted in Salzer A., *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Linz: 1893) 74.

the color of the Virgin, that is the nature of a man'.²⁹ Compared to a glass or stained glass window struck by light, the Virgin like the glass window acts as a portal, a site of crossing that acts as the threshold between the profane and the sacred.³⁰ These analogies that help elucidate the mystery of the Incarnation also became the vehicle for figuring the nature of spiritual illumination.³¹ Meiss observed that St. Bernard's and later theologians' reliance on images of the glass pane or stained glass pierced by light to illustrate the Incarnation is unusual since these analogies borrow references from art (or architecture) instead of scriptural sources. As a result, glass or stained glass as a man-made artifact dedicated to the service of God was conceptually 'retooled' in order to serve as an illustrative paradigm for the Incarnation as an object of devotion.³²

Bernard's analogy of the Incarnation to a ray of light passing through a pane of glass also informs La Tour's conception of painting insofar as he treats the visual image as a window that gives access to the sacred. Activated by verbal cues that traverse its visual content, the profane image opens onto the sacred, enabling the gleam of spiritual insight to illuminate the image. The opacity of paint is rendered transparent through the infusion of the Word, which illuminates and transforms its substance in order to enable a spiritual way of seeing and understanding. The word casts new light on the image, permeating its pictorial substance through figurative allusions which belong to the realm of insight rather than sight. Thus the image of light passing through a glass window also serves to illuminate the nature of painting as a devotional idiom that strives to represent the sacred. Used to figure the mystery of the Incarnation, this analogy also enables meditation on the art of painting as a medium of

29 See Salzer, *Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens* 74, quoted by Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol" 177, who noted that these theological analogies entered the vernacular sphere and became pervasive in the popular culture of the Low Countries in the fifteenth century.

30 Patrick Hunt has noted that the glass pane, construed as wall and sacred boundary, functioned like the 'ancient temenos threshold of a classical sanctuary or poemeterium'. See Hunt P., "Abbé Suger and the Medieval Theory of Light in Stained Glass: Lux, Lumen, Illumination", http://traumwerk.stanford.edu/philolog/2006/01/abbe_sugers_theory_of_light_lu.html.

31 See Hunt, "Abbé Suger and the Medieval Theory of Light": '[Abbé Suger] understood that the light inside the cathedral was mediated by the gemlike windows, and this transformed light took a third route: once it passed through the physical eye of the believer, it was changed once again into *illumination*, now a spiritual light that elevated the mind and renewed the spirit'.

32 Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol" 177. Cf. Cornell H., *Biblia pauperium* (Stockholm: 1925) 177. Meiss noted that this imagery of glass is an analogy based on art, which derives from the prevalence of stained glass in medieval churches.

incarnation. It serves to elucidate the meta-pictorial conditions and determinations that define it as a visual medium, as an art that reflects on its own making and the nature of representation. Indeed, the visual illustration of the mystery of the Incarnation can be seen as a metaphor for a new way of understanding painting, in which its visual nature is construed as a gateway to be crossed or, better, illuminated by the light of the word.

We now return to La Tour's *The Newborn Child* and the problem it sets for the beholder who attempts to engage with this painting as a manifestation of both the secular and the sacred. A closer look reveals that a small detail obtrudes upon the seamless naturalism of the painting, disrupting the physical reality of the scene: the candle (presumably hidden by St. Anne's raised hand) casts three circular reflections (alluding to the Trinity) on the robes of Mary and her mother.³³ Lit by candlelight, Mary's thumb hints at the newborn's gender as she holds the swaddled child, lest there be any ambiguity about his humanity. The shadow cast by the newborn's head and the reflected light of the candle seem physically verisimilar, but the radiance of the neat circle of light between them is unexpected and visually puzzling. Rather than merely casting shadows, the newborn's head appears to radiate light, thereby inscribing, through its radiance, the presence of spirit where shadows would be expected. While marking evidence of the Incarnation, the cultivated naturalism of this image enables the paradoxical conflation of incompatible and indeed exclusive realities.³⁴ La Tour's insistence on investing the sacred into images of the ordinary (or ordinary images) represents a post-Tridentine approach to representing the divine and the transcendent, which no longer required reliance on supernatural effects since it could be mediated through the everyday details of baroque naturalism.³⁵ This enabled familiar objects of visible reality to be 'looked on as emblems of a higher invisible reality', leading to the apprehension of the

33 Commenting on the nature of optical effects in *The Newborn Child*, Claudio Falcucci and Simona Rinaldi have observed that the hand covering the flame would spread the light thus doubling the child's shadow on the Virgin's gown; see Falcucci C. – Rinaldi S., "A Candle in Darkness: Light and Shadow in the Paintings of Georges de La Tour", in Merlini – Storti – Salmon (eds.), *Georges de La Tour in Milan 177*. They suggest that the visual inconsistencies in the depiction of light support the hypothesis of a 'theoretical construction of light and shadow' in his paintings.

34 It is important to keep in mind that, according to Conisbee, La Tour's 'veristic approach to religious subjects was original in French art in the 1620's'. See Conisbee, "Introduction to the Life and Art of George de La Tour" 49.

35 This approach reflected the redefinition of the sacred image in the wake of Trent as an instrument of intercession rather than primarily as a representation of divinity; see the decrees of the twenty-fifth and last session in Waterworth J. (ed.), *The Council of Trent*

transcendent 'through the faithful rendering of things seen'.³⁶ La Tour's artistic strategy in choosing to represent the sacred in and through secular imagery enabled him to bring together and even reconcile separate realities and ways of seeing.

However, La Tour's originality lies not just in his naturalistic approach to religious subjects, but also in the fact that he developed a new understanding of painting. Requiring a new way of seeing, the image renounces its visibility in order to emerge as an instrument of intercession or a site of passage, a threshold activated through crossing. Undermining the primacy of the image and the act of corporeal vision, his devotional works redirect the production of meaning by fostering forms of viewer response designed to promote insight rather than sight. La Tour's works demand a new understanding of painting, one whose visual manifestations emerge at the crossing of verbal and visual considerations, figuring the mystery of the Word made flesh. The intervention of the beholder is required to facilitate this passage, since visual details ask not just to be seen but also to be deciphered and interpreted, thereby to be experienced and understood. La Tour's paintings attest to a new understanding of seeing and to the emergence of new forms of viewer response based on 'images designed to appeal to the mind, to engage complex acts of reading and interpretation, rather than to serve as material fetishes or objects of quid-pro-quo devotional transactions'.³⁷ By questioning the status of the image, his paintings surrender their hold on the visible insofar as they allow themselves to be crossed, that is, traversed rather than merely seen.³⁸ Renouncing the lure of the visible, La Tour's paintings give themselves over to the beholder so as to enable a new understanding of what it means to see.

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36 Martin J., *Baroque* (New York: 1977) 119.

37 Nagel, "Fashion and the Now-Time of Renaissance Art" 52.

38 Cf. Jean-Luc Marion's reflections on icons in Marion J., *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. J. Smith (Stanford: 2004) 62.

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Convent and *Cubiculum Cordis*: The Incarnational Thematic of Materiality in the Cistercian Prayerbook of Martin Boschman (1610)

Walter S. Melion

Composed ca. 1610 by Martin Boschman, subprior at the Cistercian monastery of Pelplin in Gdańsk Pomerania, the *Paradisus precum selectarum quibus devota anima sese oblectari in dies poterit* (*Paradise of choice prayers whereby the devout soul shall daily be able to make itself glad*) consists of personalized prayers and spiritual exercises, written by several scribes, and of 221 engravings, the majority (115) by the Wierix brothers of Antwerp [Fig. 16.1].¹

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- 1 On the *Paradisus precum selectarum*, see Hindman S. (ed.), http://www.textmanuscripts.com/manuscript_description.php?id=3005&%20cat=p2&, which describes the book as follows: 'i (marbled paper) + iii (paper) + 373 + ii (paper) + i (marbled) ff. on paper (no visible watermarks), modern foliation, top outer corner in pencil, apparently complete, [...] suggested collation based on signatures (collation i7, ii–iii8, iv10, v8, vi11, vii16, viii–x12, xi–xiii1, xiii14, xiv9, xv12, xvi10, xvii9, xviii1, xix10, xx12, xxi10, xxii9, xxiii–xxiv13, xxv12, xxvi14, xxvii–xxxi [quires ee, ff, gg, hh, ii, 45 folios, no signatures, structure uncertain, number of quires based on extant signatures] xxxii5, xxxiii12, xxxiv10, xxxv7), each quire, except quires 27–31, signed at the beginning with a small majuscule letter, most pages end with horizontal catchwords, written by at least two scribes in very fine upright roman and italic scripts imitating printed type in twenty-nine to thirty-three long lines, no visible ruling (justification 112–110 × 68–65 mm.), red rubrics, holy names copied in gold, one-line red initials, three- to two-line red, black, gold, and silver initials, with stenciled (?) decoration in the same or contrasting colors, ornamental head- and tail-pieces throughout, title page, front flyleaf, f. iii, full-page pen-and-ink Renaissance cartouche enclosing the title in red ink, illustrated with 221 engravings, ranging in size from very small oval images to full-page, many very skillfully pasted in, the remainder full-page with text surrounding the engraving [...]. Dimensions 122 × 78 mm.'. On the Cistercian Abbey of Pelplin, see Skubiszewski P., "Architektura Opactwa Cysterskiej w Pelplinie", in *Studia Pomorskie 1* (Wrocław: 1957) 24–102; Ciemolonski J., "Ze Studiów nad Bazyliką w Pelplinie", *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki* 19 (1974) 27–66; Schneider A., "Lexikale Übersicht der Männerklöster der Cistercienser im deutschen Sprach- und Kulturraum", in Schneider A. – Wienand A. – Bickel W. – Coester E. (eds.), *Die Cistercienser. Geschichte – Geist – Kunst* (Cologne: 1986) 683; Crossley P., "Lincoln and the Baltic, the Fortunes of a Theory", in Fernie E. – Crossley P. (eds.), *Medieval Architecture and Its Intellectual Context: Studies in Honour of Peter Kidson* (London: 1990) 169–180; Frankl P.,

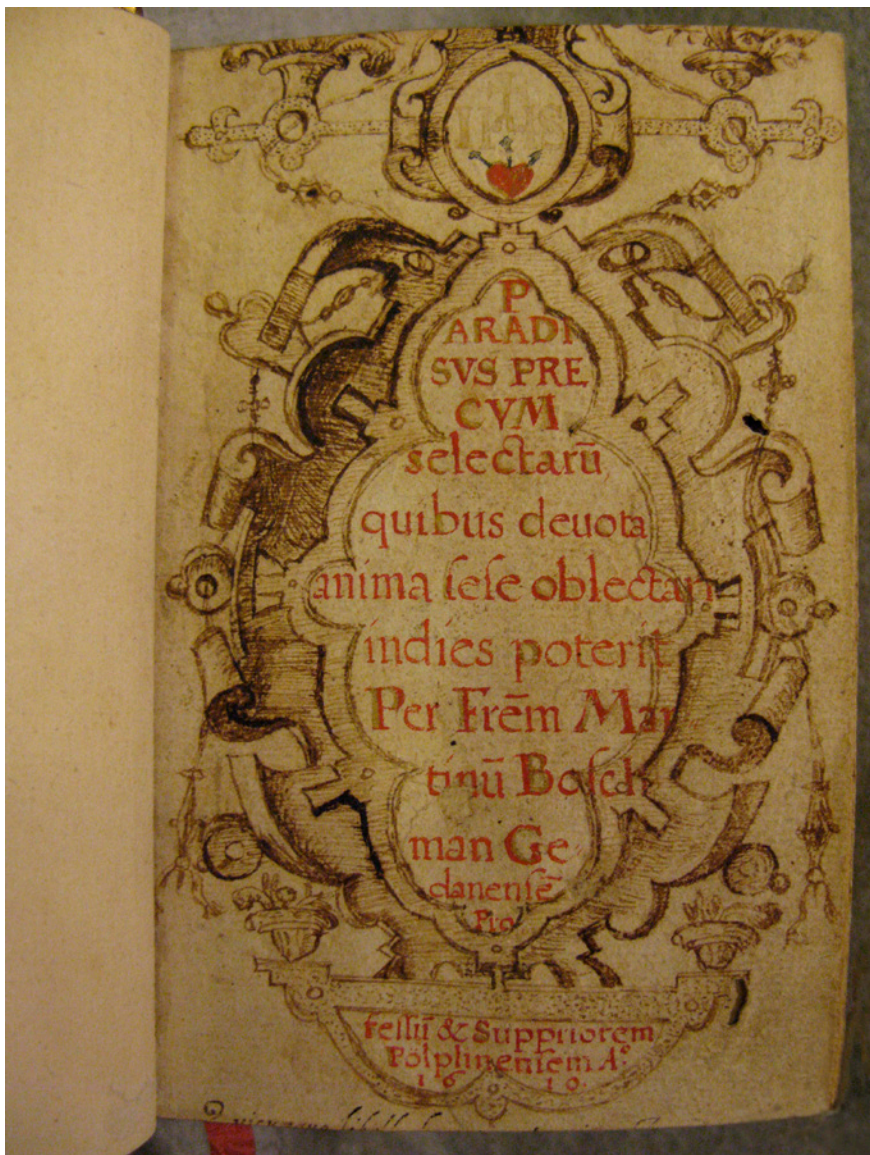


FIGURE 16.1 *Martin Boschman, Title-Page, Paradisus precum selectarum quibus deuota anima sese oblectari in dies poterit (Pelplin, Gdańsk, Antwerp, or Brussels: ca. 1610). Pen and ink in shades of brown and red, 122 × 78 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.*

Gothic Architecture, ed. P. Crossley (New Haven: 2000) 366 n. 40C; Nussbaum N., *German Gothic Church Architecture*, trans. S. Kleager (New Haven – London: 2000) 83–84, 98–99, 237 n. 251 & n. 252; Ciecholewski R., *Quis ut deus. Schätze aus dem Diözesanmuseum Pelplin. Kunst*

Boschman further identifies himself on the title page as a professed monk originally from nearby Gdańsk. Above, he incorporates an explicitly Jesuit device—the Holy Name topped by a cross and accompanied by a heart pierced by three nails—that connects his prayerbook to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius.² Indeed, in its reliance upon affective images, verbal and pictorial, and its elaboration of striking visual tropes, the *Paradisus* clearly derives from the meditative and contemplative exercises utilized by the Jesuits to reform the exercitant's soul and shore up his Christian vocation. The manuscript was designed to complement the breviary, for it primarily consists of prayers prefatory to recitation of the Canonical Office, to confession of sins and celebration of the Mass, and to the daily regimen of a Cistercian—waking to one's vigils, laboring both in mind and body, refecting and reposing in moderation, and keeping the Lord ever in consciousness.³ Replete with scriptural quotations and paraphrases, the book would have served as a ready source of meditative reading, fulfilling the daily requirement of *lectio divina* that forms part of the

zur Zeit des Deutschen Ordens / Skarby Muzeum Diecezjalnego a Pelplinie: Sztuka z czasów Zakonu Krzyżackiego (Lüneburg: 2000); Crossley P., "Nussbaum N., *German Gothic Church Architecture*", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60.1 (2001) 93–96, esp. 96; Kinder T.N., *Cistercian Europe: Architecture of Contemplation* (Grand Rapids – Cambridge, U.K. – Kalamazoo: 2002) 86; Kulig A. – Romaniak K., "Geometrical Models of Stellar Vaults", *The Journal of the Polish Society for Geometry and Engineering Graphics* 17 (2007) 51–56, esp. 53–54; Hourihane C. (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, 6 vols. (New York – Oxford: 2012) II 432; and Birkedal Bruun M. – Jamrozik E., "Introduction: Withdrawal and Engagement", in Birkedal Bruun M. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* (Cambridge – New York – Melbourne et alii: 2013) 13–14, 21 n. 42.

- 2 On the Jesuit device and its incorporation of the heart pierced by nails, see Praz M., *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 2 vols. (Rome: 1964) I 134–168; Spica A.-É., "Les jésuites et l'emblématique", *xvii^e Siècle* 237 (2007) 633–649; Guiderdoni-Bruslé A., "Heart Emblems", in Chorpenning J. (ed.), *Emblemata Sacra: Emblem Books from the Maurits Sabbe Library, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* (Philadelphia: 2006) 49–54; and Campa P.F., "Devotion and Onomasiology: The *Impresa* of the Society of Jesus", in Campa P.F. – Daly P.M. (eds.), *Emblematic Images and Religious Texts: Studies in Honor of G. Richard Dimler, S.J.* (Philadelphia: 2010) 1–28.
- 3 On the breviary, which combines elements from the Psalter, antiphonal, hymnal, homiliary, and Bible, see Quigley E.J., *The Divine Office: A Study of the Roman Breviary* (London: 1920) 25–228; Hughes A. *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to their Organization and Terminology* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 1982) 197–224; and Hope D.M. – Woolfenden G., "Liturgical Books", in Jones C. – Wainwright G. – Yarnold E., S.J. – Bradshaw P. (eds.), *The Study of Liturgy* (London – New York: 1992) 96–101, esp. 98–99. On the Canonical Office, also known as the Divine Office, see Crichton J.D., "The Office in the West: The Later Middle Ages", in *ibidem* 429–433; and *idem*, "The Office in the West: The Roman Rite from the Sixteenth Century", in *ibidem* 433–440.

Cistercian institutes.⁴ The *Paradisus* coincides with the reform efforts of Abbot Mikołaj Kostra, who renewed Pelplin between 1592 and 1610, restoring strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict and the order's statutes, as codified in the *Charter of Charity*.⁵

Either pasted or bound into the paper manuscript, the engraved illustrations are integral to its program: the images closely correlate to the verbal imagery of the prayers and scriptural passages they adjoin, and moreover, these texts, inscribed in various 'hands'—roman, italic, and cursive—often run continuously into the margins and occasionally the versos of the engraved sheets [Figs. 16.2–16.10]. Though clearly interpolated, the material circumstances of these images, which are embedded within enclosing rubrics and prayers, indicate that the pictures were meant to function in tandem with the textual imagery they occasion but also amplify. The prints, like the handwritten texts, were evidently selected and coordinated to bolster the daily offices of the book's owner, Martin Boschman, whose spiritual exercises they vivify and whose spiritual persona they both represent and cultivate. Produced in duodecimo, transcribed mainly in black ink, more sparingly in red and gold, and illustrated in black and white with only one instance of gold highlighting, the manuscript is at one and the same time lavish and unassuming, its plates finely printed and engraved, rather than richly illuminated, appropriated rather than commissioned, as befits the austere usage of a reformed Cistercian subprior.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, the materiality of the pictures, their identity as the traces

4 On the monastic requirement of *lectio divina*, see Robertson D., *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville: 2011). On *lectio divina*, as prescribed by Saint Benedict, see Kardong T.G., *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: 1996) 80–81, 91, 172, 176, 220, 344, 348–349, 381–384, 389–391, 395, 602–603, 607. On *lectio divina*, as practised by the Cistercians, see Lekai L.J., S.O.C., *The White Monks: A History of the Cistercian Order* (Okauchee: 1953) 160; and idem, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, OH: 1977) 364–366. The Cistercians occupied themselves with manual labor and spiritual reading in the intervals between the canonical hours. During winter, when there was less time for manual labor, the monks devoted the long interval between Matin and Lauds to reading and meditation.

5 On Abbot Mikołaj Kostra and his reform program, see Hindman S. (ed.), http://textmanuscripts.com/descriptions_manuscripts/TM%20402%20Boschman.pdf. On the *Charter of Charity*, see Lekai, *The White Monks* 26–28, 267–273; and McGuire B.P., "Constitutions and the General Chapter", in Birkedal Bruul (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 87–99, esp. 90–91.

6 On Cistercian spirituality and liturgy, see Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* 227–260; McGinn B., "The Spiritual Teaching of the Early Christians", in Birkedal Bruul (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 218–232; and Bell N., "Liturgy", in ibidem 258–267.

of incised copperplates, as works on paper inserted into a paper manuscript, comes to signify—or better, body forth—the material substance of Christ, who is representable precisely because he was embodied, having been made manifest in the flesh by the mystery of the Incarnation.⁷ This is tantamount to claiming that the prayerbook's materials and method of construction are crucial to the sacred argument of the *Paradisus precum selectarum*, as formulated verbally and visually in its prayerful texts and images. My essay thus asks how the pictorial images, as indices of the processes of engraving, cutting, and pasting, contribute to the meditative and liturgical program of the *Paradisus*. In a closing excursus, I consider how the Cistercian spatial imaginary, based as it is in the Rule of Saint Benedict's imagery of conventual *cubicula*—oratory, dormitory, chapter-house, refectory, kitchen, workshop, storeroom, infirmary, novitiate, and guest-house—may have encouraged the material analogies that proliferate throughout the *Paradisus*.

The book's frontispiece consists of the radiant sign of the cross made dynamically manifest and attended by angels [Fig. 16.2].⁸ That the image doubles as a heavenly diagram to be enacted both by men and angels is made obvious by the words inscribed on the stem and arms of the cross, which are recited whenever one crosses oneself: 'In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen'.⁹ Positioned at the center of the Greek cross, the image of the lamb of God carrying a Latin cross makes us aware that different kinds and degrees of cruciform image are here layered—symbolic and diagrammatic, sacramental (the lamb of God is inscribed within a host-like disc) and benedictory (the Greek cross is generative of the ritual act of signing). The couplet below calls attention to the *Paradisus* as the repository of these crosses, and to the votary as the bearer of these redemptive signs of the triumph of Christ over sin and death: 'This cross gives you life: with life reviving, it shall invigorate and give the victorious hand to bear joyful trophies'.¹⁰ The implicit reference is to the prayerbook held open by the votary who in this way bears up and displays the crosses it contains. This allusion to the *Paradisus* as a material object raised, opened, perused, and in

7 On the ways in which matter is troped to produce meaning within early modern discourses of art, see Lehmann A.-S., "How Materials Make Meaning", in Lehmann A.-S. – Scholten F. – Perry Chapman H. (eds.), *Meaning in Materials, 1400–1800 / Materiaal en betekenis, 1400–1800*, Netherlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 62 (Leiden – Boston: 2013) 6–26; and Jonckheere K., "Images of Stone: The Physicality of Art and the Image Debates in the Sixteenth Century", in *ibidem* 116–146.

8 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 1 recto (pasted-in), 78 × 64 mm. The engraving is signed 'L.B.'.

9 *Ibidem*: 'In hoc signo vinces. In nomine Patris & Filii & Spiritus Sancti. Amen'.

10 *Ibidem*: 'Haec tibi dat vitam Crux: Hac dabit alma vigorem, / Laetaque victrici ferre trophaea manu'.



FIGURE 16.2 Frontispiece, "In hoc signum vinctes," in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 1 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 78 × 64 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

other ways manipulated analogizes the action of grasping and carrying it to that of taking up the cross of Christ and acknowledging the heavy weight with which our sins have freighted him.

As will be evident, Boschman's approach to meditative prayer, like that of the Jesuits, is intensely visual, and relies heavily upon the exercitant's capacity skillfully to fashion descriptive and evaluative images of his *corpus* and *anima*, the spiritual condition of which he strives to judge and reform.¹¹ In pursuing this goal, he makes virtually no distinction between the mental images that are said to issue from his mnemonic and imaginative faculties, and the pictorial images that so richly punctuate the spiritual exercises assembled in the *Paradisus*. The engravings pasted and bound into the *Paradisus* anchor the process of meditative visualization, allowing the votary to negotiate between and reconcile the two registers of vision—corporeal and spiritual—upon which his prayers depend. The various genres of prayer texts—*commendationes*, *confessiones*, *invocationes*, *litaniae*, *orationes quotidianae*, *orationes speciales*, *prae-fationes*, *precationes*, *salutationes*—attach very closely to the printed images, rather than amplifying or transforming them ekphrastically.¹² The viewer is counselled to internalize the images he encounters on the page, to imprint them mentally, and conversely, he is instructed to use his bodily senses, sight above all, to restrain memory and imagination, faculties all too prone to divagate from the topics to be meditated. This two-way movement is mutual: it cycles back and forth between bodily and mental vision; the one mode does not so much displace as support the other. In this bilateral engagement with images, the materiality of the printed images comes to signify several things: first and foremost, their substance serves to evoke the incarnate and sacrificial body of Christ; second, their sensory properties stand for the votary's organs of sense that require fully to be consecrated to the service of Christ; third, their method of production—incising, printing, pasting—equates to the manner in which the printed images are meant to be conveyed, or better, translated deep into the penitent heart.

11 On the place of images in Jesuit spiritual exercises, see Dekoninck R., *Ad imaginem: Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: 2005) 19–208; and Melion W.S., *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print, 1550–1625* (Philadelphia: 2009) 105–187.

12 The wide range of prayers assembled in the *Paradisus* identifies it as a *libellus precum*; on this genre of prayerbook, see Boynton S., “*Libelli precum* in the Central Middle Ages”, in Hammerling R. (ed.), *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 13 (Leiden – Boston: 2008) 255–318.

'Tuis vulneribus cor meum saucia': Troping the Material Image

Let us begin, then, by inspecting the transit from page to heart. Dedicated to Christ the Lord, a small image of the infant Jesus holding whip and scourge, seated within the votary's heart, and enframed by ideograms of the *arma Christi*, inaugurates the first preparatory prayer for the Canonical Office [Fig. 16.3].¹³ Outlined within a double border, affixed to and raised slightly above the surface of folio 31 recto, the print's material status as an interpolated image is made very apparent. The layering of this cropped sheet onto the folio sheet, its pasting in, literalizes the printed image's stabilizing function, as defined by the *oratio praeparatoria*: 'Even if I, a great sinner, a worthless pile of ashes, am unfit, [Lord], to stand by you, or to set eyes upon you ('vel oculos ad te levare') [...] [yet do] I beseech you [...]. Restrain my vision, my motley thoughts, my invisible enemies'.¹⁴ The material fixity of the fastened image is intended to assist the votary in his efforts to attach himself, with all his powers of mind and body ('viresque mentis & corporis'), to the image of Christ incarnate that the Lord proffers to his faithful adherents.¹⁵ The very first line of the prayer underscores this point by addressing Christ the Lord as *promptissime Amator*—'Lover most prompt, most visible, most prompt to make himself visible'.¹⁶ The prefatory prayer, then, is designed to cleave closely to the printed image, whence in its imagery, it seems to issue.

The image of Christ bound, scourged, crowned with thorns, and publicly mocked, a version of the Ecce Homo, introduces the short sequence of *orationes* and *meditationes* to be recited during and after the Canon of the Mass [Fig. 16.4].¹⁷ The inscription, taken from *Psalms* 21:7, emphasizes that the sacrificial humanity of Christ is here displayed, abused, and abased: 'But I am a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people'.¹⁸ The prayer and meditation that attach to the closing versicle of the Mass, 'Ite Missa

13 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 31 recto (pasted-in), 23 × 18 mm. The engraving is unsigned.

14 Ibidem, fol. 31 recto-verso: 'Etsi ego vilissimus cinis, & maximus peccator, indignus sim coram te assistere, vel oculos ad te levare: [...] obsecro te [...]. Cohibe visum, cogitationes varias & hostes invisibiles'.

15 Ibidem, fol. 31 verso: 'Conforta caput, pectus, vocem, viresque mentis & corporis'.

16 Ibidem, fol. 31 recto: 'O Praesentissime, Intentissime & promptissime Amator'.

17 Ibidem, fol. 50 recto (bound-in), 89 × 60 mm. On this print, engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Ruyven-Zeman Z. van – Leesberg M. (comps.), *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, 1450–1700: The Wierix Family*, eds. J. van der Stock – M. Leesberg, 10 parts (Rotterdam: 2003–2004) II 122, no. 332.

18 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 50 recto: 'Ego sum vermis, et non homo, opprobrium hominum, & abiectio plebis. Psalmo xxi'.

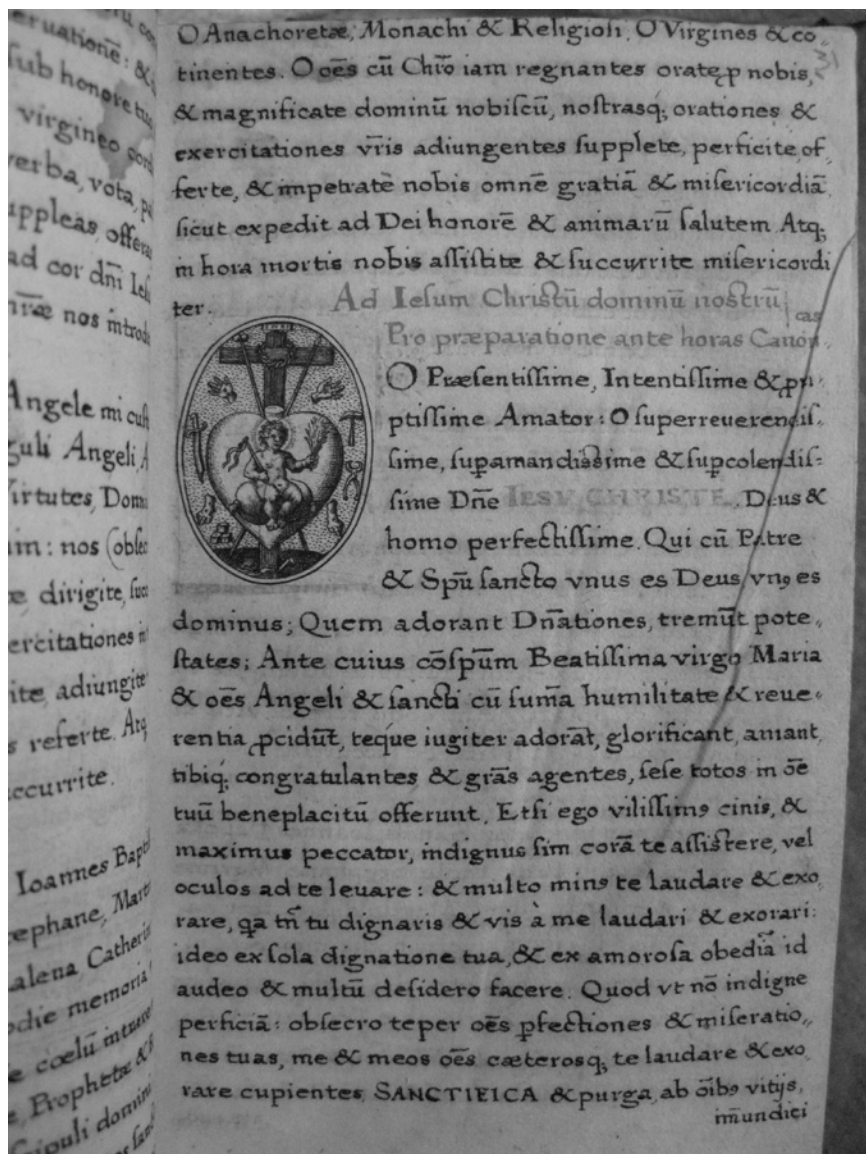


FIGURE 16.3 Anonymous, Infant Jesus with the Arma Passionis, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 31 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 23 × 18 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

est', contrast this material image of the Ecce Homo to the purely mental image to be visualized as its complement—Christ enthroned in heavenly majesty and worshipped by angels returning from the celebration of the Eucharist. The material image is analogized to the human body of Christ, the physical properties of which make him susceptible to various afflictions, both sensory and emotional. It is this sacred body, once palpable though now discarnate, that the image makes discernible and verifies to be present in the sacrifice of the Mass. On the contrary, the celestial image of Christ glorified has no counterpart, for it exists spiritually not materially: 'When finally, "Ite Missa est", is sung, cause your mind to rise heavenward with the holy angels returning [from the Mass], in order that you may be given to behold, as you desire, the Lord Jesus sitting in majesty, who having now been conveyed to the Father, can no longer be seen on earth in the Sacrament. And so, ignite your desire by means of [this] image of desolation, like unto persons reluctantly separated from their friends'.¹⁹

Focusing on the humanity of Christ and presenting him as a man severed from his family and forlorn, the engraving provides the *imago desolationis* that preconditions and makes possible, as an exercise in antithesis, the spiritual *imago* of Christ triumphant [Fig. 16.4]. The *meditatio* then takes up this corporeal image and applies it to the votary, whose humanity forces him to live apart from his one true friend, Christ in heaven. Whereas he longs for his flesh to dissolve, that he may be united with Christ the Lord, in this life he must rely solely on spiritual vision, if he wishes to glimpse Christ glorified: 'Behold my Lord has returned to heaven, leaving me desolate on earth. [...] I long to be dissolved, to be with Christ, but who shall liberate this unhappy man from the body of death? [...] Oh my sweet love [...] deign frequently to lift up my mind to you, so that formed in mortality and unable to see you bodily, I shall at the least deserve often in spirit to behold you magnified'.²⁰ The contrast between the two types of image—terrestrial and celestial—turns upon the distinction between matter and spirit, between an image bound by mate-

19 Ibidem, fol. 50 verso: 'Quando in fine Ite missa est canitur, fac ut mens tua cum sanctis Angelis revertentibus in coelum subleuetur, quatenus dominum Iesum in maiestate presidente per desiderium mereari conspiciere quem in Sacramento missum ad Patrem iam in terra non potes amplius videre. Accende igitur desiderium tuum per imaginem desolationis more eorum qui suis inviti separantur ab amicis'.

20 Ibidem: 'Ecce dominus meus ad coelos redijt, me desolatum in terra dereliquit. [...] Cupio dissolvi & esse cum christo, sed quis me infelicem hominem liberabit de corpore mortis huius? [...] O dulcis amor meus [...] digneris mentem meam in te frequenter sustollere, ut qui te corporaliter videre in hac mortalitate constitutus nequeo, saltem affectu & desiderio in tuo sanctissimo amore sublevatus, te spiritu crebrius merear in gloria contueri'.



FIGURE 16.4 Hieronymus Wierix, *Ecce Homo*, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 50 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 89 × 60 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

rial conditions and circumstances, and an image unbounded and immaterial because inspired by the Spirit. The *Ecce Homo*—engraved into copperplate, its beveled borders clearly impressed, its hatches cut with finely-faced and sharply-tipped burins, its lettering incised in italic, printed in ink of a specific viscosity on paper of a specific weight, its lower margin written over in roman, its borders trimmed and sinister side sewn—in its very substance epitomizes and distills the condition of materiality that the *imago desolationis* purports to demonstrate [Fig. 16.4]. For Boschman, I think it fair to presume, the status of this image qua material image would have heightened its value as a meditative *machina* appertaining to the two species of meditative image-making, the one perceptible, phenomenal, and comparable to Christ incarnate, the other virtual, disembodied, and comparable to Christ transfigured.

Materiality and bodily sensation are central concerns of the *Mirror of Penitence* and its attendant *precatio*, entitled “Prayer of the penitent who feels himself greatly oppressed by the heavy weight of sins” [Fig. 16.5].²¹ The print opens the subsection entitled “Exercises and Prayers of Contrition and Penitence”.²² The repentant evildoer is shown seated on a chair precariously balanced on two staves perched over the well of damnation (‘Puteus infernalis’). Inscriptions on the well rim describe it as a spider’s web in which the sinner is ensnared, and also as constituted from elemental ephemera that heat and time will inevitably dissolve. The epithets and plaques pendant from the swords ‘Devil’, ‘Sin’, ‘Death’, and ‘Maggot’ that stab the penitent, call attention to his weak and sinful flesh: just right of his head, for instance, is a short quotation from *Galatians* 5:17, ‘The flesh strives against the spirit’.²³ These vari-

21 Ibidem, fol. 67 verso (bound-in), 86 × 63 mm. On this print, engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* VIII 131–132, no. 1794. Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 67 recto: ‘Precatio poenitentis se mole peccatorum nimia pressum sentientis’.

22 Ibidem: ‘Sequuntur exercitia et orationes contritionis & poenitentiae’.

23 Inscription above: ‘Speculum peccatoris’. Flanking the topmost sword: ‘Ultor iniquitatum gladius’. Flanking the penitent’s head: ‘Deducar in puteum interitus. Caro concupiscit adversus spiritum [Gal. 5:17]’. Adjacent to sword at upper left: ‘Diabolus’. Plaque hanging from sword: ‘Satanas stat a dextris meis ut adversetur mihi [Ps. 50:5]’. Adjacent to sword at upper right: ‘Peccatum’. Plaque hanging from sword: ‘Peccatum meum contra me est semper [Ps. 18:5]’. Adjacent to sword at lower left: ‘Mors’. Plaque hanging from sword: ‘Circunderunt me dolores mortis [Is. 66:24]’. Adjacent to sword at lower right: ‘Vermis’. Plaque hanging from sword: ‘Vermis meus non morietur’. Well rim: ‘In araneorum tela sedet. Elementa tandem tempore et calore solventur’. Well: ‘Puteus infernalis’. Legs of chair: ‘Quatuor elementa’. Inscription below: ‘Si omnia ista considero nunquam gaudere potero’.

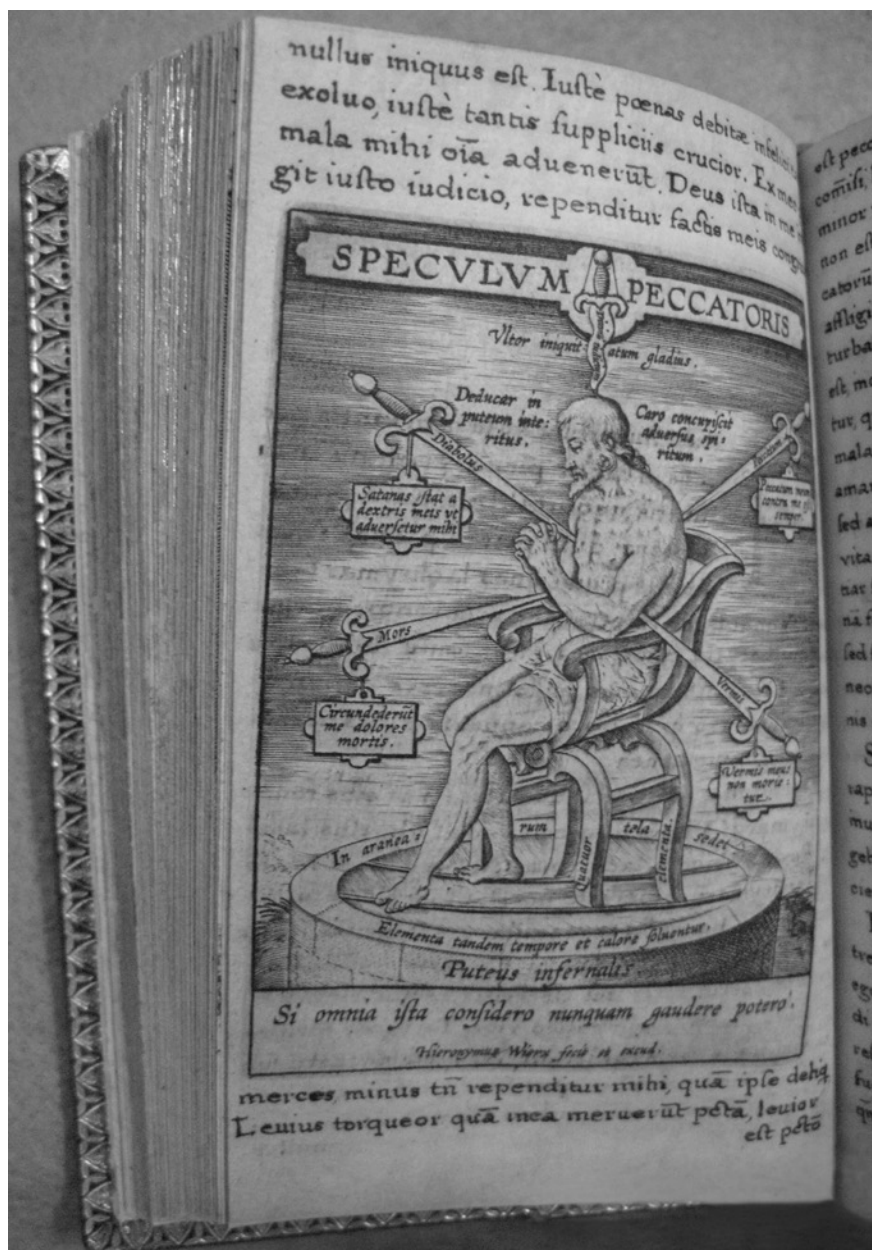


FIGURE 16.5 Hieronymus Wierix, Mirror of Penitence, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 67 verso. Engraving (bound-in), 86 × 63 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

ous allusions to sinful flesh go hand in hand with the prayer's references to sin's deplorable effects upon the faculties of memory and sensation. Surfeited by sin, *memoria* fails to record the full extent of the sinner's criminal deeds. ('Non sufficit referre memoria tantorum crimina gesta'.)²⁴ Accordingly, the sinner begs to be made sensible to suffering and answerable for his sins, in short, to be pierced by sorrow: '[My] spirit has grown hard, it is pierced by no remorse ("nullo moerore compungitur"). My soul has turned dumb: my soul has been made insensate'.²⁵

The prayer's call for a renewal of bodily sensation commensurate with the punishments owed for one's transgressions requires the votary to project himself onto the printed image, to feel himself stabbed by the pricklings of conscience and pierced by the sharp daggers of compunction. The thematic of embodiment operates in tandem with the print's material properties. The carving of the copperplate, the linear traces incised by the engraver's burin, function readily as sensory analogies to the piercing of the remorseful soul, cut deeply by its awareness of sin's dire consequences. The verb *compungere* recalls the action of incising with a burin, for it signifies cutting with a sharp point.²⁶ The *Mirror of Penitence's* allegorical imagery supports this analogy: the tips of the daggers pressing into the penitent from above and from all sides are contiguous with the outlines of his head, torso, arms, and back. These outlines seem to emerge from the daggers as if delineated by them. The conceit serves to imply that the sinner, overcome by remorse, is wholly constituted by his sense of sin—drawn from it, one might say—but the conceit also reinforces the parallel between compunction that pierces the heart, fashioning the sinner into an epitome of penitence, and the art of engraving that pierces the copperplate, fashioning the image of the *Speculum peccatoris*. Implicit in the print and the *precatio* is a corollary allusion to the trope of printing: the admission that one's *memoria* has shown itself incapable of recording the enormity of one's crimes, and the consequent appeal for a renewal of conscience, presupposes an attempt to reform memory, making it more capacious and impressionable, that is, more receptive to the *imprints* of conscience.

The trope of engraving, along with allied tropes, such as that of printing, recurs frequently and pointedly in the *Paradisus*. To take one final example:

24 Ibidem, fol. 67 recto.

25 Ibidem: 'Obriguit animus, nullo moerore compungitur. Anima mea in stuporem conversa est. Insensata facta est anima mea'.

26 On the trope of piercing the 'flesh' of vellum or paper, see Carruthers M., *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (Cambridge, U.K.: 1998) 100–101; and Melion, *Meditative Art* 264.

the small oval image of the *Pietà* and collateral prayer, “Special invitation to the beloved Jesus”, form part of the long subsection on Communion, that starts midway through the *Paradisus* [Fig. 16.6].²⁷ The *Pietà* is staged like a *tableau vivant*: curtains rise to reveal Mary cradling the body of Christ, the cross, lance, and sponge at her back, the crown of thorns and three nails at her feet. The “Special Invitation” calls attention to the *Pietà*’s material properties, utilizing tropes of pasting and engraving to enhance the communicant’s experience of heightened attachment to Christ. The imagery is at once nuptial and dolorous:

Come, most sweet spouse, into my soul, and dig into my heart with your wounds (‘tuis vulneribus cor meum saucia’). With your blood make drunk my mind; with your body purify my body; with your soul sanctify my soul; with your spirit vivify my spirit; with your divinity totally transform me into you and fasten me to you (‘me totum in te transforma & agglutina’): so that whithersoever I turn, I see you always crucified for me, and whatsoever I behold appears rubricated by your blood. And thus, all of me having been changed into you, I shall be able to discover nothing apart from you, and to descry nothing but your wounds. This is my consolation, with you, my Lord, to be wounded, with you despised, with you to suffer. Let this be my inmost affliction—to meditate anything without you, to take comfort in anything outside you. May my heart not rest, good Jesus, until it finds you at its center, there to sleep, there to repose, there to put an end to longing.²⁸

The reference to rubrication is a further allusion to the book, many of whose capitals, headings, subheadings, and instructions to make the sign of the cross are written in red ink. The verb *sauciare* (‘to cut into, furrow, wound’) aligns the imagery of the *vulnera Christi* to that of the engraving plate’s furrow-like

27 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 110 recto (pasted-in), 27 × 20 mm. The engraving is unsigned. Ibidem: “Invitatio specialis dilecti Iesu”.

28 Ibidem: ‘Veni dulcissime mi sponse in animam meam: & tuis vulneribus cor meum saucia: Tuo sanguine mentem meam inebria: Tuo corpore, corpus meum castifica: tua anima, animam meam sanctifica: Tuo spiritu, spiritum meum vivifica: Tua divinitate me totum in te transforma & agglutina: ut quocunque me vertero, semper te videam pro me crucifixum: & quicquid aspexero, tuo sanguine mihi appareat rubricatum: ut sic totus in te transiens, nihil praeter te valeam invenire: nihil, nisi tua vulnera intueri. Haec sit mihi consolatio, tecum mi domine, vulnerari, tecum despici, tecum pati. Haec intima sit mihi afflictio, sine te aliquid meditari, aut extra te consolari: non quiescat cor meum, bone Iesu, donec inveniat te centrum suum, ubi cubet, ubi requiescat, ubi suum terminet appetitum’.

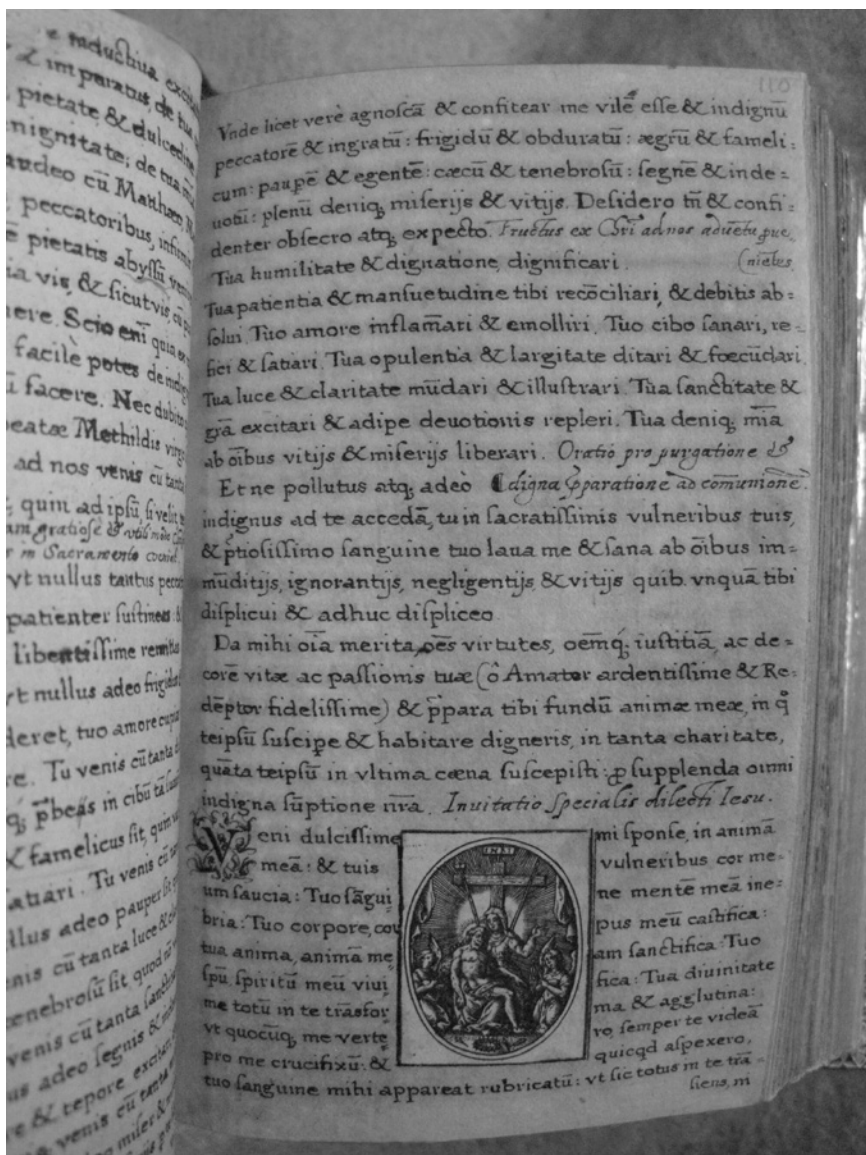


FIGURE 16.6 Anonymous, Pietà, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. no recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 27 × 20 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

incisions, cut into the copper by the burin. The phrase ‘meditate anything without you’ (‘sine te aliquid meditari’) emphasizes that the image to be engraved upon the heart is meditative in form and function: it must wound the heart, cutting so deeply and impressing so indelibly, that the votary’s every mental image is subsumed into the master image of Christ crucified. This trope converts the votary’s image-making faculty into a kind of engraving plate: from it issue multiples of the crucified Christ that fill and captivate the mind. These corollary images are to be colored red, as if saturated with his redeeming blood. The verb *agglutinare* (‘to glue, stick, paste’), and the phrase ‘fasten me to you’ (‘me [...] agglutina’), connect the operation of attaching oneself to Christ, to that of pasting-in the image of the *Pietà*. Affixing the printed image is troped as mnemonic fixing of the image of Christ wounded. Amongst this dense layering of analogies, the smallness of the image and its distinctive position (not at the start but at the center of the prayer text) also come into play. The diminutive format tallies with the prayer’s call so profoundly to internalize the suffering of Christ that the thought of anything else is itself an affliction. The term *intima* (‘inmost, furthest from the outside’) emphasizes that the image upon which the votary seeks to meditate should be containable, enclosable within the confines of his heart. The small size of the *Pietà* evokes this quality of containment and compression that allows the image inwardly to be transported. The large narrative print of the *Deposition* that immediately precedes the *Pietà* allows it to be appreciated all the more as a condensation, a meditative and presentational reformulation, of this subject from the historical Passion.²⁹ So too, its embedment within the text—at its core, one might say—implicitly argues that the *Pietà* should be lodged firmly within the votary’s heart, there to remain forever discernible and retrievable. In sum, every aspect of the print’s material and technical composition correlates to the argument of the meditative and invitational prayers that surround it. These prayers are in every sense responsive to the reflexive image of the Virgin praying, upon which they elaborate.

Paper and the Body of Christ

The degree to which the *Paradisus* calls attention to its status qua book and to its handling by the votary, along with the plenitude of exercises focussing on the transition from corporeal to spiritual image-making and vision, complement

29 Ibidem, fol. 109 recto (bound-in), 102 × 67 mm. On this print, engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* II 174, no. 379.

the user's attempts to negotiate between registers of the image—material and representational, visual and textual, sensible and spiritual—as he strives to attach himself to Christ, melding his heart with the sacred heart. It will therefore come as no surprise that the book's chief constituent part—paper—likewise proves central to its meditative program.

The *Paradisus*, as a whole and in its parts, is a work on paper: the variable heft, texture, opacity, and transparency of the sheets are readily discernible to the hand or eye; the pasted-in prints project shallowly from the pages onto which they are affixed, giving added stiffness to their underlying folios; these folios and the folios consisting entirely of text alternate with the printed sheets bound-in as folios, their margins and versos overwritten. The latter folios appear slightly thinner and more transparent, perhaps as a result of the pressure exerted by a roller press. They would also seem to be lighter in color than the slightly ochre folios that predominate throughout the volume. The pasted-in prints, on the other hand, like their supporting folios, have been stained brown by glue that has bled into the paper fabric. Technical analysis is required to verify whether the differences in paper density are indeed a function of the printing process. If the paper fibers and watermarks, upon close examination, indicate a common source for the majority of sheets, including those imprinted with images, then the book is likely to have been assembled where the engraved plates were available for printing—perhaps in the Antwerp workshop of Hieronymus Wierix or the Brussels workshop of Jan Wierix.³⁰ Be that as it may, I want here to consider how the imagery of several prayers having to do with self-purification alludes to the material properties of paper, more precisely, to the mode of production whereby clean sheets of paper, suitable for printing and writing, are fashioned from linen and cotton rags.³¹ Torn, stained, and discarded, these rags are pulped in water; having been macerated, often by pounding, and their filaments separated, the matted fibers are then

30 Although initial examination of the manuscript, as documented in Hindman (ed.), http://www.textmanuscripts.com/manuscript_description.php?id=3005&%20cat=p2&, produced no evidence of watermarks, a closer investigation of the paper by conservators at the New York Public Library may yet be warranted.

31 On early modern methods of papermaking, see Hunter D., *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: 1943; reprint ed., New York: 1974) 77–202, 224–280; Studley V., *The Art and Craft of Handmade Paper* (New York: 1977; reprint ed., New York: 1990) 30–77; Laurentius T., “Paper in the Netherlands”, in Robinson F. – Peck S. (eds.), *Fresh Woods and Pastures New: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Drawings from the Peck Collection* [exh. cat., Ackland Art Museum, U.N.C., Chapel Hill] (Chapel Hill: 1999) 29–33; and Krill J., *English Artists’ Paper, Renaissance to Regency* (New Castle, DE – Winterthur: 2002) 13–63.

lifted from the water onto a wire-mesh screen bounded by a deckle (a wooden frame that fits over the mesh tray and holds in the pulped fibers, yielding the required thickness of paper). The thin fibrous mass is then pressed between felt to extrude the excess water, and the resultant sheets are hung to dry.

The process of manufacture I have just described, involving the transformation of soiled and shredded fabric into virgin paper, invites comparison of the book's chief constituent part—its paper support—to one of its chief meditative themes—the conversion of fallible matter, the mere bread and wine of the Mass, into the real presence of Christ, that is, into his sacrificial body, blood, and spirit. The fact that the many images of the crucified Christ and of *Christ the Man of Sorrows*, to be found throughout the *Paradisus*, rely upon the color and texture of the paper to represent the flesh of Christ, supports this analogy between paper and transubstantial presence. Take the image of *Christ the Man of Sorrows* praying on our behalf, that introduces the meditation on the general offertory prayer of the Mass: the inscription, 'Spare, Lord, spare your people', doubles as our plea to Christ and Christ's plea to God the Father.³² His advocacy, as the contiguous *oratio* stresses, signifies the Pauline doctrine (*Hebrews* 8:1–13) that Christ is both priest and victim, from whose peerless self-sacrifice on the cross the Mass derives its efficacy [Fig. 16.7]. In showing his wounds to the Father, who mercifully echoes the gesture of the Son, Christ subsumes our prayers into his, allowing our hearts to unite with his saving heart:

Most merciful Jesus, our high priest and pontiff, [offer yourself to God the Father], you who are true God and true man, truly present in the sacrament and sacrifice of the Mass, along with all that you endured, achieved, and perfected for our salvation [...] in conjunction with your most sweet heart [...]. Offer now these things aforesaid in a sacrifice of propitiation for our sins and those of the whole world, and for the expulsion of our enemies.³³

32 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 33 recto (pasted-in), 63 × 43 mm. The engraving is unsigned. The supplicatory verse, 'Parce domine parce populo tuo', forms part of a Lenten antiphon that derives from Joel 2:17.

33 Ibidem, fol. 33 recto-verso: 'Superbenignissime Iesu, summe Sacerdos & Pontifex noster: temetipsum verum Deum & hominem in Sacramento & sacrificio Missae realiter praesentem cum omnibus quae assumpsisti, fecisti, & pertulisti pro nostra salute [...] per suavissimum cor tuum [...]. Offer etiam praedicta in Hostiam placationis pro nostris & totius mundi peccatis, & pro hostibus repellendis'.



FIGURE 16.7 Anonymous, Christ the Man of Sorrows as Mediator, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 33 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 63 × 43 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

In this formulation, our prayers, transcribed on the page, become his prayers, and his attitude of prayer, portrayed in the image, becomes ours; and just as the written page now attaches to him, so its paper can be seen to mediate between his flesh and ours, for it serves to represent the flesh he offers as an expiation for the sins of our flesh. The substance of the paper, along with its material properties of color, texture, weight, and thickness, functions as a proxy for our sinful body that is borne up by the Man of Sorrows and necessitates the sacrifice of the body of Christ. There is another parallel at play, of course: as paper is here marked with the image of Christ, so his flesh is marked by the *vulnera passionis* that secure the remission of sin.

Although imagery evocative of papermaking recurs throughout the *Paradisus*, most intensively in the subsection on penitence, it is first introduced very early in the prayerbook. One of the first *precationes*, written to be recited in the morning, when the monk dons his habit, subtly brings to mind the process of converting rags into paper, and further, tropes this process to signify the spiritual exercise of conforming oneself to Christ. The action of dressing is analogized to that of putting on the garment of Christ's perfected humanity ('induere'); conversely, the repudiation of carnal desire is compared to the action of casting off the (presumably soiled) garment of human flesh ('exuere'):

Dress me, Christ, in yourself, you who were created according to divinity, and in the second place, according to humanity, you who in justice and the sanctity of truth are most obedient to the Father, you who are most fit to cast off carnal desire, to subdue the body's members, to crucify the kingdom of the flesh. Be to me a garment that shields against the cold of this world, whereby I may be sustained, fortified in the face of sins, and protected from every kind of injurious adversity: for by your absence, straightway all becomes torpid, infirm, deadly; but by your presence, lively, secure, and strong. And as I wrap my body in this garment, so by your grace you enrobe my soul: wherefore, mortality and corruption having been put off, let this my body be dressed in the robe of immortality, in the glory of resurrection, and let it be conformed to the body of your splendor.³⁴

34 Ibidem, fol. 2 recto: 'Indue me christe teipso homine secundo, qui secundum Deum creatus es, iustitia & sanctitate veritatis Patri obsequentissimus, ad exuendas concupiscentias, domanda membra, & crucifigendum regnum carnis. Tu mihi adversus frigus hoc mundi esto indumentum, quo fovear, adversus peccata muniar & ab omnibus adversitatibus iniurijs protegar: qui si absis, omnia fiunt prorsus torpida, infirma, mortua; sin adsis, vivida,

Discarded like an unwanted garment, the body of man is wholly refashioned, its imperfections whitened, and the soul of man reclothed in the body of Christ. The fabric of human flesh, remade in the image of Christ, is freed of corruption and enlivened, and the human spirit wrapped round by a different sort of covering, more secure and insulating. The prayer is propaedeutic, in that it prepares the votary to engage with the images of Christ that will soon proliferate in the *Paradisus*, to inject himself into them, in this sense to put them on, as if paper were made of fabric. These similes and mixed metaphors—of fabric being cast off, re-formed, purified, and whitened, of the body of Christ made planar, present, and wearable—anticipate the many images and prayers to follow, in which papermaking and the material properties of paper are educed and then troped to promote the reformation of the reader-viewer.

The allusions to papermaking gradually become more explicit in the subsection containing prayers supplementary to the canon of the Mass. In the subsection on Communion, for example, the prayer of thanks that accompanies the paired images of *Christ the Man of Sorrows* and the *Virgin of Sorrows* salutes Christ for having pulled the sinner apart ('eruiſti'), washed him in baptismal water and cleansed him of impurities ('mundasti ab omni peccato'), conferred on him a new substance ('incorporaſti'), and marked him as his property ('signaſti') [Figs. 16.8–16.9].³⁵ This verbal imagery derives from *Romans* 6:3–5, which construes the sacrificial blood of Christ as baptismal water that renews and saves; it also complements the nearby image of Mary awash with bitter tears that transform her into an epigone of the Man of Sorrows (just as her *typus* Noemi, 'beautiful', cited in the inscription from *Ruth* 2:20, was transformed by sorrow into Mara, 'bitter').³⁶ The transformation of the baptized, like that of the Virgin, exemplifies the dissolution and precipitation of the votary, whom the prayer portrays as a substance radically reworked by Christ.

tuta, fortia. Et ut corpus amictu hoc circumdo; ita tu animam meam tua gratia vestias: quo corpus ipsum deposita mortalitate & corruptione, in resurrectionis gloria immortalitatis stola induatur, & corpori claritatis tuae conformetur'.

- 35 Ibidem, fols. 61 verso–62 recto: 'Gratias ago tibi pro eo quod me per baptismum de potestate daemonis eruiſti, mundasti ab omni peccato, regeneraſti in filium gratiae, redemptionis tuae participem me feciſti, & ab omni poena liberaſti, nominasti, incorporaſti, signaſti, gratificaſti & spiritu tuo vivificaſti'. On *Christ the Man of Sorrows*, fol. 60 verso (bound-in), 83 × 60 mm., engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* IV 11, no. 663; on the *Virgin of Sorrows*, fol. 61 recto (bound-in), 82 × 62 mm., see ibidem, no. 664. The two prints are catalogued as pendants.
- 36 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 61 recto: 'Non vocetis me Noëmi, ſed vocate me mara; quia amaritudine replevit me Omnipotens. Ruth 2'.

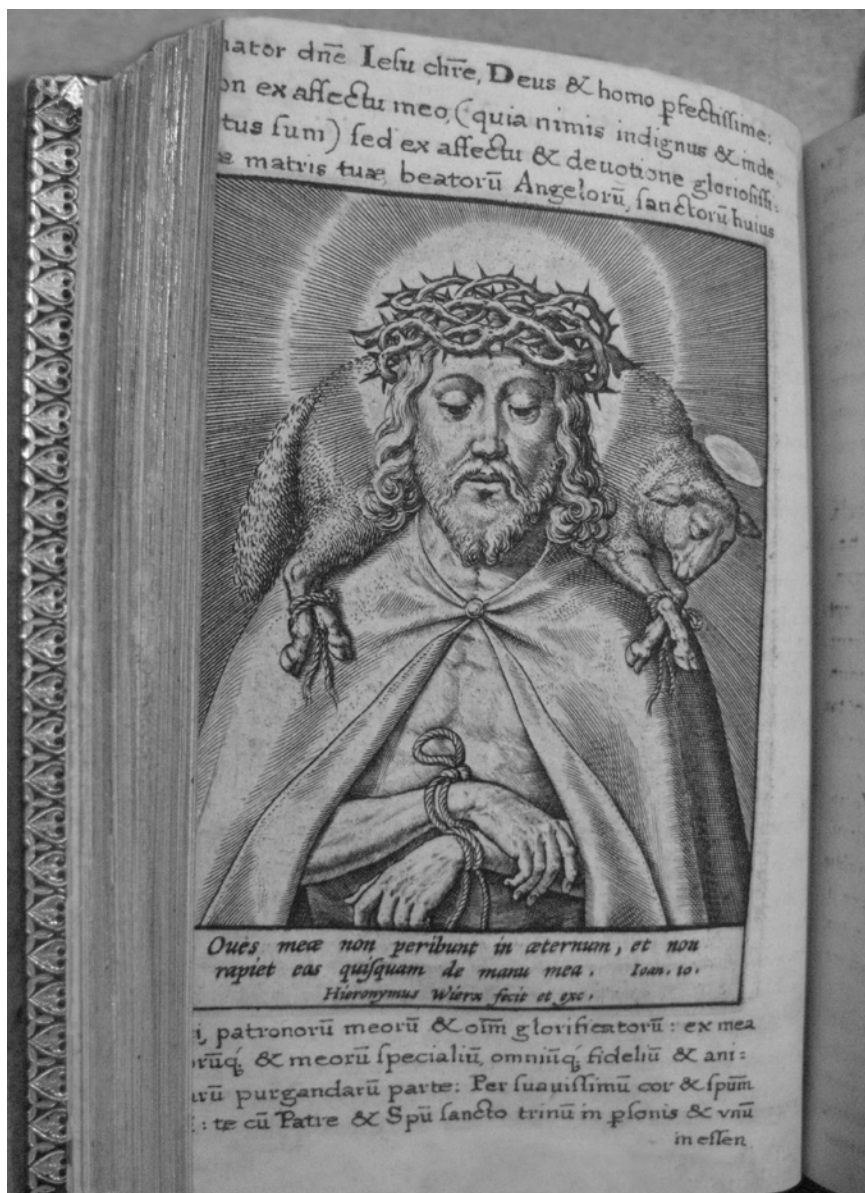


FIGURE 16.8 *Hieronymus Wierix, Christ the Good Shepherd and Man of Sorrows, in Martin Boschman, Paradisus precum selectarum, fol. 6o verso. Engraving (bound-in), 83 × 60 mm. Pendant to Figure 16.9. Print Collection, New York Public Library.*



FIGURE 16.9 Hieronymus Wierix, Virgin of Sorrows, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 61 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 82 × 62 mm. Pendant to Figure 16.8. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

He handles the sinner after the fashion of a papermaker, shredding him, then washing, cleansing, condensing, and finally impressing him, as if with a papermark. These effects may be construed as both artisanal and spiritual: they describe the process of papermaking, but at the same time, they function as tropes for the process of spiritual remaking that the prayer of thanks vividly commemorates. The *artifex* of these techniques, who refashions the *anima* of the votary, treating it as pliable and malleable *materia*, is Christ himself.

The *Paradisus*, in its spiritual program, aims to manipulate the soul as if it were paper, imprinting and affixing it with the image of Christ, and binding it to the exercises assembled within the book's covers. The imagery of papermaking envisions how the *Paradisus*, if properly deployed, macerates what sin has hardened, then resolves what has been dissolved, in order to activate the further processes of impressing and imprinting, trimming and attaching, designed to renew and restore Martin Boschman. The penitential prayers approximal to the second iteration of *Christ the Man of Sorrows* ascribe these processes to his skilled hand that manipulates human substance, in the way that embodied in the flesh, Christ allowed himself to be manipulated [Fig. 16.10]:³⁷ 'Remember, Lord, what is my substance; remember that I am of the earth; remember that I am ash and dust. Extend your right hand to the work of your hands, be mindful of [my] feeble matter, succor [my] carnal fragility, [my] infirm condition [...]. Heal my wounds, Lord; before I die, dissolve the chains of my sins. [...] [I confess, Father,] that I have not feared to perpetrate evil deeds fit to be execrated, which your one and only beloved [Son] cleansed with such torment, and purged with so much bitterness'.³⁸ The engraver's exceptionally fine hatches model the Holy Face, the flesh of which, here as elsewhere in the *Paradisus*, is formed from the tone, color, and texture of the paper, combined with echelons of engraved lines. That Christ incarnate is here construed as the work of divine artifice encourages us to discern in the matter and workmanship of the image, figurations of the spiritual processes to be effected upon our *corpora* and *animae* through daily usage of the *Paradisus* and close attention to its material properties.

37 Ibidem, fol. 70 recto (pasted-in), ca. 83 × 60 mm. On this engraving, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* IV 11, no. 663. Whereas the impression on fol. 60 verso is bound-in, this impression is pasted-in.

38 Ibidem, fol. 69 verso: 'Memento domine, quae sit mea substantia, memento quia terra sum, memento quia cinis & pulvis sum. Operi manuum tuarum porrigere dexteram, consule infirmæ materiae, succurre carnali fragilitati, infirmæ conditioni [...]. Sana domine vulnera mea; solve priusquam moriar, meorum vincula peccatorum. [...] non timui exccranda illa perpetrare scelera, quae dilectus unicus tuus, tam cruciabiliter diluit, & tanta cum amaritudine expiavit'.



FIGURE 16.10 *Hieronymus Wierix, Christ the Good Shepherd and Man of Sorrows, in Martin Boschman, Paradisus precum selectarum, fol. 70 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 83 × 60 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.*

'Diligenter operemur': Meditative Artifice and the Cistercian *Officina*

The final context for these meditative endeavors would seem to have been the Cistercian institutes, centered on training the hand and the heart, and on applying body, mind, and spirit to the imitation of Christ.³⁹ Crucial too was the cubicular imagery of the Rule of Saint Benedict, which binds the professed monk to perpetual habitation of the convent's definitive *loca*. The first of his three vows—*stabilitas*—requires him to promise that these places will become his whole world, the sites where he shall fulfill his further vows of *conversatio* ('fidelity to the monastic lifestyle') and *oboedientia* ('obedience to the Rule').⁴⁰ Amongst the Cistercian *loca*, as we shall see, the *oratorium* ('oratory'), the *cellarium* ('storeroom'), the *coquina* ('kitchen'), and the *officina* ('workshop') were especially susceptible to meditative troping. The *Paradisus's* pictorial images invite detailed consideration of the material circumstances of these places, assisting the votary closely to visualize them as he sets about the task of converting these *cubicula* into *cubicula cordis*, conforming his soul to their specific shape, space, and texture, in order that the events taking place within them may also be seen internally to transpire within him. The frame of reference for this process of conversion, as noted above, is the cubicular imagery of the Rule, which was itself construed by Cistercians not merely as a rule of life but also as if it were an actual place, habitable in body, mind, and spirit.

Hugh of Fouilly's *Aviaryum* (*Aviary*), also known as the *Libellus quidam ad Rainerum conversum cognomine Corde Benignum* (*Little Book for Rainier the Lay Brother called the Kindhearted*), an allegorical treatise first written for the

39 On the Cistercian commitment to prayer, study, and manual labor, see France J., *Separate but Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers, 1120–1350* (Collegeville: 2012) 36–56; idem, "The Cistercian Community", in Birkedal Bruun, *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 80–86, esp., 84–85; Hoffman Berman C., "Agriculture and Economies", in ibidem 112–124; Reilly D.J., "Art", in ibidem 125–139; and Bell D.N., "Libraries and Scriptoria", in ibidem 140–150, esp. 142–43.

40 On *stabilitas*, see Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 34–35, 41, 80–81, 96, 462–464, 467, 470, 473, 492–493, 497–498, 501. On *conversatio*, ibidem 3, 5, 24, 33–34, 37, 217–19, 223–225, 401–403, 462–465, 473–474, 514–517, 602–605. On *oboedientia*, ibidem 1, 3, 7–8, 103–104, 109–110, 580–582, 587–588, 592–593. For the Cistercians, the Benedictine paradigm of *stabilitas* is predicated on each monk knowing and inhabiting 'his own place' within the community; see Rule 43, "De his qui ad opus Dei vel ad mensam tarde occurrunt", 351. On communal stability and its relation to individual placement, see ibidem 355. On spatial language in the Rule of Saint Benedict, see Wathen A., O.S.B., "Space and Time in the Rule of St. Benedict", *Cistercian Studies* 17 (1982) 82–98.

Augustinians sometime before ca. 1172 but soon thereafter enthusiastically adopted by the Cistercians, best distills this attitude to the Rule as a *locus* to be inhabited by its adherents. Hugh compares his order's monks to doves, its lay brothers to hawks, both of whom roost upon the Rule, for to profess it is to live together within it:

See how the hawk and the dove sit on the same perch. I am from the clergy and you from the military. We come to conversion so that we may sit within the life of the Rule, as though on a perch; and so that you who were accustomed to seizing domestic fowl now with the hand of good deeds may bring to conversion the wild ones, that is, laymen.⁴¹

The Rule of Saint Benedict, paraphrasing *Matthew* 7:13, characterizes in spatial terms the monk's vow of obedience: it involves a commitment to walking the narrow way, that is, to living within the Rule's bounds: "Therefore they seize on the narrow way, of which the Lord says: "The route that leads to life is narrow"'.⁴² Orderic Vitalis, in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, identifies the founding of Cîteaux, the Cistercian mother house, with strict adherence to the Rule.⁴³ Here and elsewhere in the order's founding documents the monastery and the Rule, the place where the Rule is followed and the manner of its following, are described as virtually synonymous, if not indistinguishable. Robert of Molesme, co-founder of the eponymous brotherhood of Cîteaux, is quoted as stating:

41 Quoted in Clark W.B., *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloys's Aviary*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton: 1992) 118: 'Ecce in eadem pertica sedent accipiter et columba. Ego enim de clero, tu de militia. Ad conversionem venimus ut in regulari vita quasi in pertica sedeamus; et qui rapere consueveras domesticas aves, nunc bonae operationis manu silvestres ad conversionem trahas, id est saeculares'. On Hugh of Fouilloys's *Aviary*, see France, *Separate but Equal* 61–66.

42 Rule 5, "De oboedientia", in Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 102–103: 'Ideo angustam viam arripiunt—unde Dominus dicit: "Angusta via est quae ducit ad vitam"'. On the 'narrow way', see *ibidem* 108.

43 On Orderic Vitalis's identification of place with Rule, see France, *Separate but Equal* xiii; and *idem*, "The Cistercian Community", in Birkedal Bruun (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 80. On the complementary notion, adapted from *Deuteronomy* 32: 10 and codified in the *Exordium Cistercii*, that the Cistercian vocation first unfolded when Robert de Molesme and his followers chose to tame a 'place of horror and of vast solitude' ('locum tunc scilicet horroris et vastae solitudinis') by renewing strict observance of the Rule, see Birkedal Bruun – Jamrozak, "Introduction: Withdrawal and Engagement", in *ibidem* 4–5.

We have made our profession, my dear brothers, according to the Rule of our holy father Benedict, but it seems to me that we have not observed it in every point. We have many customs that are not laid down there, and we carelessly overlook a number of its precepts. [...] I propose therefore that we should observe the Rule of Saint Benedict in everything, taking care not to turn aside either to the left or to the right.⁴⁴

The pasted-in print by Thomas de Leu on folio 27 recto, part of the subsection on daily prayers ('exercitium diurnum'), identifies the Rule with the place where it is lived [Fig. 16.11].⁴⁵ Cistercian monks and nuns are shown kneeling at the feet of Saint Bernard, who presents them to their major patrons—the Virgin and Child, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica—and also prepares to receive from Benedict the open book of the Rule. A parallel is drawn between Mary's offering of the infant Christ, who blesses the congregants, and Benedict's offering of the Rule, which is bestowed like a blessing. Engraved beneath the front row of monks, the phrase 'Congregatio B. Mariae' ('Congregation of Saint Mary') jointly applies to the Cistercians and to their monastic *locus*, as the addendum 'Polplinensis' ('of Pelplin'), written in black ink, indicates. Taken from *Psalms* 83:8, the inscription, 'For the lawgiver shall give a blessing, they shall go from virtue to virtue', is a further allusion to the identity of house and Rule, for it completes the thought begun in verse 5, 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord: they shall praise thee for ever and ever'. (The term 'lawgiver' refers both to Christ, bestower of the New Law, and to Benedict, bestower of the *Regula monachorum*.)

The event unfolds within an oratory that appears exactly as Benedict stipulates in rule 52; empty of everything but the worship it contains, the oratory

44 Quoted in France, *Separate but Equal* xiii; also see Vitalis Orderic, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. – trans. M. Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford: 1969–80) IV 312–313: 'Nos fratres karissimi secundum normam sancti Benedicti professionem fecimus sed ut mihi videtur non eam ex integro tenemus. Multa quae ibi non precipiuntur observamus, et de mandatis eiusdem plura neglegentes intermittimus. [...] Laudo igitur ut omnino regulam sancti Benedicti teneamus canentes ne ad dexteram vel ad sinistram ab ea deviemus'.

45 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 27 recto (pasted-in), 78 × 53 mm. Figures on podium inscribed: 'S. Benedictus'; 'S. Scolastica'. Monk presiding over kneeling fellow monks and nuns, inscribed: 'S. Bernar.'. Beneath the monks: 'Congregatio B. Mariae Polplinensis' (the reference to Pelplin interpolated in pen and ink). Adjacent to choir of angels: 'Certate et certae sunt vobis'. Between the congregants and the Virgin and Child: 'Monstra te esse matrem. Sumat per te preces natus tuus'. Inscribed below: 'Benedictionem dabit legislator / Et ibunt de virtute in virtutem. psal. 83'. Engraved by Thomas de Leu and dated 1600, the print, as the inscription attests, was issued in Paris.



FIGURE 16.11 *Thomas de Leu, The Cistercian Congregation of Pelplin Kneeling before the Virgin and Child, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica, 1600, in Martin Boschman, Paradisus precum selectarum, fol. 27 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 78 × 53 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.*

becomes one with its function, which is to propagate *orationes*: 'The oratory should be in fact what it is called ('hoc sit quod dicitur'), and nothing else should be done or stored there'.⁴⁶ The oratory, in other words, should be seen as conjoined with its orants and with their action of praying. This is surely why the nuptial wreaths being conferred by the angels above, echo the curve of the building's vaults, as if to imply that these monks, united indeed plaited by their devotion to the Rule, have become part of a single fabric or edifice of faith. The wreath-like text alongside promises that these garlands shall assuredly be theirs ('[coronae] certae sunt vobis') if they but endeavor to embrace the Rule ('certate'). The prayer to Saint Benedict on facing folio 26 verso entreats the saint to marry these monks to himself and to Christ by means of the Rule they conjointly observe: 'Ah, pray for us who under the law and your institute actively serve Christ, so that we may be made worthy to be joined to you in heavenly marriage through observance of your Rule'.⁴⁷

The adjacent prayer to Saint Bernard encourages the votary internally to visualize what the pictorial image externally portrays, or alternatively, to construe this picture as the external representation of the internal image, comprising both place and Rule, *oratorium* and *regula*, that the votary strives to envision. Bernard is to be imagined presiding over his monastic offspring as their foremost patron, and, in a reflex of meditative image-making, they are to be seen as imagining piously to themselves this longed-for scene of paternal patronage. In this spiritual exercise, the place becomes a *cubiculum cordis*, the Rule a rule of heart. The frame and trigger for this internalizing operation is the sacred heart, in and through which the pictorial image transits as it moves from the prayerbook page to the votary's prayerful heart:

And hail to you, most blessed father Bernard, the glory of our Cistercian institute, through the most sweet heart of the Lord Jesus. O olive tree fruitful in the house of God, O oil of joy nurturing with benefits, scintillant with miracles, you shed light upon this nascent order and wondrously propagated it; in departing from this life you promised to intercede on behalf of your sons and to be their patron. Ah then, show that you are our father, live on as patron of our congregation and universal order, protect,

46 Rule 52, "De oratorio monasterii", in Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 414–415: 'Oratorium hoc sit quod dicitur, nec ibi quicquam aliud geratur aut condatur'. On the *oratorium*, see *ibidem* 416.

47 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 26 verso: 'Eya ora pro nobis sub lege & instituto tuo Christo militantibus, quatenus per observantiam regularum tuarum, digni efficiamur tibi coniungi in coelis'.

cherish, and defend us who devotedly picture to ourselves your aid ('pie de adiutorio tuo praesumentem protege').⁴⁸

It bears repeating that the dynamic exchange between the external and the internal image is anchored in the descriptive specificity of De Leu's engraving, which conveys the material circumstances of a Cistercian oratory and, by way of the interpolated monniker 'Polplinensis', purports to portray a specific oratory, namely, that of the monastery of Saint Mary at Pelplin.

Throughout the *Paradisus*, place operates at one and the same time as something actual and material, but also as something concretely imagined. Hieronymus Wierix's print of the *Annunciation* on folio 52 recto is a case in point [Fig. 16.12].⁴⁹ The print illustrates the subsection on prayers supplementary to the sacrifice of the Mass and, for this reason, alludes to the place where the Mass is celebrated—namely, the oratory. Mary receives the angel Gabriel in a secluded chamber that exemplifies the Cistercian usage of *oratoria* as places of private, not merely corporate devotion. Rule 52 clearly spells out this dual function of the oratory:

When the Divine Office is finished, they should all leave in deepest silence and show reverence for God. Thus will the brother who may wish to pray by himself not be hindered by the thoughtlessness of another. But if someone perhaps wishes to pray privately at some other time, let him simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and full attention of heart. Therefore, whoever is not busy with this kind of work is not permitted to remain in the oratory, as the place is called. For the prayer of another should not be disturbed.⁵⁰

48 Ibidem, fols. 26 verso-27 recto: 'Ave & tu suavissimum cor domini Iesu beatissime pater Bernarde, nostri Cisterciensis instituti gloria. O oliva fructifera in domo Dei, o oleum laetitiae fovens beneficijs corruscans miraculis, tu huic nascenti ordini lumen attulisti, & eundem mirifice propagasti, qui migraturus ex hoc seculo, te exoraturum pro filijs & patronum fore promisisti. Eya ergo, monstra te esse Patrem nostrum & hanc congregationem universumque ordinem sub patrocínio tuo degentem, & pie de adiutorio tuo psumentem protege'.

49 Ibidem, fol. 52 recto (bound-in), 101 × 70 mm. On this print, engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* I 130, no. 124.

50 Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 414–415: 'Expleto opere Dei, omnes cum summo silentio exeant, et habeatur reverentia Deo, ut frater qui forte sibi peculiariter vult orare non impediat alterius improbitate. Sed et si aliter vult sibi forte secretius orare, simpliciter intret et oret, non in clamosa voce, sed in lacrimis et intentione cordis. Ergo qui simile opus non



FIGURE 16.12 Hieronymus Wierix, Annunciation, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 52 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 101 × 70 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

However, the pictorial image is also intended to call forth the internal and, in this sense, deeply private image of the Annunciation that the monk may wish to visualize to himself when praying the Angelus. The votary is instructed on folio 51 verso that he can recite this prayer privately to himself before his early morning vigils, even though the Cistercian order does not mandate it ('poterit nihilominus privatim illas dicere').⁵¹ And it is especially suitable to recite it at eventide while setting before one's eyes a recollected image of the Annunciation, in loving memory of the mystery of the Incarnation ('eiusce memoria proponitur').⁵² Seen in this light, the *Annunciation* print can be said to form the basis of the mnemonic image that inhabits as well as represents a virtual place, not the monastic oratory but the oratory of the heart within which this Marian mystery is lodged. The material effects of texture and light so skillfully portrayed by Wierix are transferred from the one image to the other, giving both images their shared quality of vividness and verisimilitude.

The subsequent print again alludes to the *oratorium*, this time associating it with the *officina*, where manual labor serves as a counterpart to the monk's daily prayers and meditative reading [Fig. 16.13]. The boy Jesus sits beside his mother, reading attentively while she diligently sews.⁵³ The analogy between reading and sewing derives from the age-old monastic trope that likens scriptural reading to the gathering of memorable passages into *catenae*—chains of thoughts. The links of the chain resemble a series of stiches, for as the former are interlinked, so the latter are sewn together. For the Cistercians, as will soon become apparent, the connection between manual and meditative labor was authorized by close reading of the Rule of Saint Benedict. It suffices for now to emphasize that Mary and Jesus occupy and thereby sanctify a twofold space which stands for both oratory and workshop. So too, the sharpness of the Virgin's needle alludes to the piercing insight (*acumen ingenij*) that Christ brings to bear as he reads: 'During the daily reading (*viz., lectio divina*), when

facit, non permittatur explicito opere Dei remorari in oratorio, sicut dictum est, ne alius impedimentum patiatur'. On *intentio cordis*, see *ibidem* 418.

51 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 51 verso: 'Licet in ordine nostra non sit consuetudinis mane ad salutationem Angelicam pulsare, sed tamen meridie & vesperi, tamen devotus religiosus orationes tunc diei solitas, poterit nihilominus privatim illas dicere ad primum pulsum qui fit in Ecclesia ante vigiliis'.

52 *Ibidem*: 'Vespertinus autem in memoriam Incarnationis Christi in utero virginis: sive id postremum mysterium, mane completum sit, sive meridie, sive vesperi: non incongrue tum vesperi eiusce memoria proponitur, quod sub totius mundi vesperam, novissimis & postremis conditi orbis temporibus, in ultimo seculo & promissum olim, & completum postea fuerit'.

53 *Ibidem*, fol. 53 recto (pasted-in), 77 × 45 mm. The engraving is unsigned.



FIGURE 16.13 Anonymous, The Boy Jesus Reading while the Virgin Sews, in Martin Boschman, *Paradisus precum selectarum*, fol. 53 recto. Engraving (pasted-in), 77 × 45 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.

the signal has been given and the book taken up, resume reading at the regular place, while sitting amongst your fellows, and read silently what you have resolved to read'.⁵⁴ The prayer to be recited before one begins refers to the reader's acuity as a kind of labor performed in imitation of Christ: 'Lord Jesus Christ, source of all wisdom, light of the heart: I entreat you to impart illumination of mind, acuteness of insight, and clarity of understanding, so that my labor in learning and reading may serve to glorify you and assist my fellow men, and may be salutary to me'.⁵⁵ *Labor* in this context, as exemplified in the print, signifies mental *and* physical toil, and plays upon the analogy between the manipulation of materials and the interpretation of Scripture. Typically, the prayer continues by imploring Christ to send forth his wisdom, so that seated like him and reading with him, we shall labor to transform our mind, heart, and will, using them better to know and love him. This prayer of supplication requires us to imagine him seated within us, whence his presence shall transform our faculties, making them more like his. The print's modest oratory cum workshop becomes a template for our heart and soul where, in the fullness of his presence, Christ is invited to reside and transform us: 'Despatch wisdom, Lord, from the seat of your greatness, that it may be with me and labor beside me, granting me ever to know what is acceptable before you. Give me, Lord God, the helpful wisdom of your habitation, in order that it may illuminate my intellect, purify my heart, and inflame my will to know and love you as my Lord in everything and above everything'.⁵⁶

The *Penitent Magdalene* on folio 56 recto, which marks the start of the subsection on penitential devotion and the examination of conscience, represents the oratory as it was viewed by the Cistercians in their founding documents [Fig. 16.14]:⁵⁷ the *Exordium Cistercii*, for instance, describes Cîteaux as a

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- 54 Ibidem, fol. 52 verso: 'Cum ad lectionem regularem signum datum fuerit, assumpto volumine studij tui locum lectionis regularis ingredere, sedens cum alijs, quod volueris sub silentio lege'.
- 55 Ibidem, fols. 52 verso-53 recto: 'Domine Iesu christe omnis sapientiae fons, & lumen cordis: Largire mihi quaeso, mentis illustrationem, acumen ingenij, & intelligentiae claritatem ut meus in discendo & legendo labor nomini tuo glorificando & proximo adiuvando serviat, mihiq[ue] sit salutaris'.
- 56 Ibidem, fol. 53 recto: 'Emitte domine sapientiam de sede magnitudinis tuae ut mecum sit, & mecum laboret, ut sciam quid acceptum sit coram te omni tempore. Da mihi domine Deus sedium tuarum assistricem sapientiam quae intellectum meum illuminet, cor meum purificet, & affectum meum inflammet ad cognoscendum & amandum te dominum meum in omnibus & super omnia'.
- 57 Ibidem, fol. 56 recto (bound-in), 84 × 62 mm. On this print, engraved and likely designed by Hieronymus Wierix, see Van Ruyven-Zeman – Leesberg (comps.), *Wierix Family* VII 197, no. 1613.



FIGURE 16.14 *Hieronymus Wierix, Penitent Magdalene, in Martin Boschman, Paradisus precum selectarum, fol. 56 recto. Engraving (bound-in), 84 × 62 mm. Print Collection, New York Public Library.*

place of prayer set in a wild and solitary desert, where the monks have gone to withdraw from the world and reform themselves according to the Rule.⁵⁸ The 'harshness of the place', though it clearly evokes the fallen condition of sinful humankind that necessitates the order's reform program, also accords with the rigors of the Rule that the Cistercians have sworn to uphold. The wilderness thus signifies what it is that the monks strive to tame—the wasteland to be found in every sinful heart—and the rigorous conventual regime, centered in the oratory, that sets about the task of reforming the monastic life. It is the multivalent image of Cîteaux, of the convent's way of life, and of the sinful heart that longs to be reformed:

After many labors, therefore, and exceedingly great difficulties [...] they at length attained their desire and arrived at Cîteaux—at that time a place of horror and vast solitude. But judging that the harshness of the place was not at variance with the strict purpose they had already conceived in mind, the soldiers of Christ held the place as truly prepared for them by God: a place as agreeable as their purpose was dear.⁵⁹

In the *Sententia*, Saint Bernard utilizes similar imagery, referring to the cloister as a 'desert', its inhabitants as desert-dwellers, its spiritual mode of communal life as this desert's 'southern plain'.⁶⁰ These similitudes connote a place whose

58 On solitary wilderness as the originating place of the Cistercian vocation, see Birkedal Bruun – Jamrozak, "Introduction: Withdrawal and Engagement", in Birkedal Bruun (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 5; also see note 43 supra. On the trope of wilderness in Cistercian usage, with specific reference to *eremus* and *desertum*, see Renna T., "The Wilderness and the Cistercians", *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 30.2 (1995) 179–189.

59 Ibidem; also see Waddell C., *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, Cîteaux: Studia et Documenta 9 (Brecht: 1999) 400: 'Exordium Cistercii 1: Igitur post multos labores ac nimias difficultates [...] tandem desiderio potiti Cistercium devenerunt, locum tunc scilicet horrois et vastae solitudinis. Sed milites Christi loci asperitatem ab arcto proposito quod iam animo conceperant non dissidere iudicantes, ut vere sibi divinitus praeparatum tam gratum habuere locum quam carum propositum'.

60 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sententia* III.91, in Leclercq J. – Rochais H.M. – Talbot C.H. (eds.), *Sancti Bernardi opera*, 8 vols. (Rome: 1957–77) VI.2 140: 'Regio australis est claustrum, vel eremus [...] et per australem plagam socialis vita et spiritualis bonorum conversatio designatur. Claustralis vero paradisus ad suavam spirantis austri clementiam, quasi tot floribus vernat, quot virtutibus abundat'. On Bernard's imagery of the cloister as a desert, see Birkedal Bruun – Jamrozak, "Introduction: Withdrawal and Engagement", in Birkedal Bruun (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order* 6–7. On the relevance of Bernard's spirituality and theology to Cistercian authors in the later sixteenth century,

material circumstances, as befits any penitential abode, are purposely trying to the body and the spirit.

The “Prayer Prefatory to the Examination of Conscience”, written in the margins of the *Penitent Magdalene*, insists on the identity of the Magdalene and the votary, both of whom are seen to have fallen very low, their attempts to rise repeatedly foiled by their inveterate offences (‘conatus sum surgere, heu me totiens doleo iterum corruisse’).⁶¹ By extension, the grotto—a dark hole in the ground—that functions as the Magdalene’s oratory also serves to represent her fallen condition, along with that of the votary. At the same time, this ‘place of horror and vast solitude’ purports to portray the actual oratory where the monks of Pelplin go to confess their sins publicly and privately, prostrating themselves in the manner of the Magdalene:

And so, having in mind prostrated himself before the Lord, let the cenobite recall to memory his greater offenses, and, seeking humble pardon, let him deplore his imperfection. But most of all, let him consider whether in word or deed he has offended anyone or done something detrimental to a fellow brother, whether he has offended against charity or due reverence or knowingly saddened someone. If he knows himself generally in some matter to have violated the Rule and the statutes of the Fathers, offending against God, himself, a prelate, or a neighbor, let him endeavor to recall this in the examination here set out, and let him resolve to purge his secret [sins] in the morrow’s Confession, and let him sincerely and in good faith purge his public and repeated transgressions, having held himself to account before his fellows. Let him regret the sins committed, atone the sins repented, and beware the sins yet to be committed.⁶²

see Posset F., “The ‘Double Right to Heaven’: Saint Bernard’s Impact in the Sixteenth Century”, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.3 (2003) 263–273.

61 Boschman, *Paradisus*, fol. 56 recto.

62 Ibidem, fol. 57 recto: ‘Sic coenobita coram Domino mente prostratus potiores negligentias ad memoriam revocet, & veniam humilem postulans suam imperfectionem deploret. Maxime autem recogitet si quempiam verbo vel facto offenderit si quid contra fratrem dixerit, si contra charitatem & reverentiam aliquid commiserit, vel si scienter aliquem male contristavit. Et generaliter in quocunque se contra Deum, seipsum, contra Praelatum, contra proximum sive Regulam vel statuta patrum deliquisse cognoverit, ad examen huius capituli revocare studeat & de secretis in Confessione crastina, de publicis & regularibus transgressionibus in proximo capto se accusando expurgare fideliter & ex animo proponat: Doleat de commissis, satisfaciat de contritis, caveat de committendis’.

I have been exploring inflections of the coventual *cubiculum*—specifically, of the oratory—within the text-image apparatus of the *Paradisus*: whether actual or virtual, external or internal, this place correlates both implicitly and explicitly to the thematic of materiality that operates throughout the manuscript as an instrument of prayer and soul-formation. The order's discursive practices, above all its reading of the Rule, licensed these variations on the oratory's visual form, function, and meaning, and on the ways in which it and other monastic *cubacula* were troped. In closing, let us further examine the visual character of this field of discourse. The Cistercian imagery of place goes hand in hand with artisanal imagery of work and materials. In the Prologue to the Rule, Benedict refers to the monk as an *operarium* ('artisan, workman'): 'The Lord, seeking a worker for himself in the crowds to whom he cries out, says: "Which of you desires life and longs to see good days?"'⁶³ In rule 4, on the commission of good works, Benedict calls the monastic community an *officina* ('workshop'), its good works *instrumenta* ('instruments'), its efforts to enact the commands of God and cultivate such virtues as mercy, chastity, and forbearance, an *ars spiritalis* ('spiritual craft'). He thus implies that the monk's thoughts and actions are to be treated like materials gathered in an *officina* for the purposes of being worked:

These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft ('instrumenta artis spiritalis'). If we have wielded them ceaselessly day and night, and returned them on Judgment Day, we will receive that reward from the Lord which he promised. What eye has not seen nor ear heard, God has prepared for those who love him. The workshop ('officina') where we should work hard at all these things ('diligenter operemur') is the monastic enclosure and stability in the community.⁶⁴

For Benedict, communal *stabilitas* is conjoined, indeed identified with the notion that the monastery is a kind of workshop. Moreover, his term

63 "Prologus", in Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 1, 3: 'Et quaerens Dominus in multitudine populi cui haec clamat operarium suum, iterum dicit: "Quis est homo qui vult vitam et cupit videre dies bonos?"' On the monk as *operarium*, see *ibidem* 13.

64 Rule 4, "Quae sunt instrumenta bonorum operum", in *ibidem* 80–81: 'Ecce haec sunt instrumenta artis spiritalis. Quae cum fuerint a nobis die noctuque incessabiliter adimpleta et in die iudicii reassignata, illa merces nobis a Domino recompensabitur quam ipse promisit. "Quod oculus non vidit nec auris audivit, quae praeeparavit Deus his qui diligunt illum". Officina vero ubi haec omnia diligenter operemur claustra sunt monasterii et stabilitas in congregatione'. On the *instrumenta artis spiritalis*, see *ibidem* 95, 101–102.

for reward—*merces*—denotes the payment received by an artisan for his skilled labor.⁶⁵

The correspondences between monk and artisan, the monastic life and artisanal competence, accompany the Rule's emphasis on the bodily and, especially, manual expression of humility as an essential component of the monastic vocation. As rule 7 puts it, 'the twelfth step of humility is achieved when a monk's humility is not only in his heart, but is apparent in his very body to those who see him. That is, whether he is at the Work of God (*in opere Dei*—chanting the Divine Office), in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on a journey, in the field or anywhere at all, whether sitting, walking or standing', he must body forth the virtue of submissiveness, bowing his head and gazing fixedly earthward.⁶⁶ The Cistercian reform placed renewed emphasis on the importance of daily manual labor as a method of humbling and disciplining the body. Benedict had devoted rule 48 to this requirement, adding in rule 57 that 'if there are skilled workers (*artifices*) in the monastery', they must be allowed to practice their crafts (*ipsas artes*), so long as they do so 'with all humility' and by permission of the abbot.⁶⁷ Conversely, if while 'working in the kitchen, the cellar, in serving, in the bakery, the garden, or at any craft' they clumsily break or lose something, or commit some mistake, they must confess it before the abbot and the whole community and make satisfaction.⁶⁸

65 On *merces* as the monk's reward, see *ibidem* 95.

66 Rule 7, "De humilitate", *ibidem* 131, 134–135: 'Duodecimus humilitatis gradus est si non solum corde monachus sed etiam ipso corpore humilitatem videntibus se semper indicet, id est in opere Dei, in oratorio, in monasterio, in horto, in via, in agro vel ubicumque sedens, ambulans vel stans, inclinatio sit semper capite, defixis in terram aspectibus'. On Benedict's conception of humility, as it relates to that in his source, *The Rule of the Master*, see *ibidem* 162–168.

67 Rule 57, "De artificibus monasterii", in *ibidem* 457: 'Artifices si sunt in monasterio cum omni humilitate faciant ipsas artes, si permiserit abbas'. On Benedict's endorsement of *artifices*, viz., 'anyone who has acquired uncommon skill in any form of work through training and practices', see *ibidem* 458; and Lentini A., O.S.B., *San Benedetto: La Regola* (Monte Cassino: 1950; reprint ed., 1980) 502. On rule 48, "De opera manuum cotidiana", as an antidote to *otiositas*, see Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 383–384; on Benedict's philosophy of work, as it relates to rule 48, see *ibidem* 398–401.

68 Rule 46, "De his qui in aliis quibuslibet rebus delinquant", in *ibidem* 367: 'Si quis dum in labore quovis, in coquina, in cellario, in ministerio, in pistrino, in horto, in arte aliqua dum laborat, vel in quocumque loco aliquid deliquerit, aut fregerit quippiam aut perdidit, vel aliud quid excesserit ubiubi, et non veniens continuo ante abbatem vel congregationem ipse ultro satisfecerit et prodiderit delictum suum, dum per alium cognitum fuerit, maiori subiaceat emendationi'. On the rule of self-avowal sanctioned by this passage, see *ibidem* 376–377.

How they handle and conserve materials, and the degree to which they prove capable of reconciling skill and humility, are central concerns of Benedict and, as such, were to become matters of concern to the Cistercians.

Another point of crucial interest to Benedict, and hence to the Cistercians, was the need to harmonize the active and contemplative lives. As Terrence Kardong has recently observed in his commentary on the Rule, Benedict diverged from his fellow early monastics in greatly dignifying the office of cellarer, which he elevated to a position of trust and authority on the biblical model of the deaconate, as described in 1 *Timothy* 3.⁶⁹ The cellarer's material duties are thereby viewed through the Pauline lens of the deacon's spiritual responsibilities, the one serving as an analogue to the other. Appointed to keep watch over the monastery's material provisions, the cellarer must simultaneously 'keep guard over his own soul', serving as an example to the whole community, for whose members he is 'like a father' ('sicut pater').⁷⁰ His care of things extends to the spiritual care of persons, making him a collaborator with the abbot, rather than a simple functionary: 'He should be a wise person, of mature character and well disciplined. He should not be gluttonous, arrogant, violent, unfair, stingy, or wasteful. Rather, he should be one who fears God and is like the father to the whole community. He should take care of everyone'.⁷¹ Saint Jerome's metonymic reference to memory as the *cellarium memoriae* (Letter 107.12), within which the materials stored are scriptural passages, underwrites the association between material and spiritual matters that Benedict jointly views as coming under the cellarer's purview. Jerome further develops this material analogy when he introduces the term *pensum* to designate the sacred verses that must daily be memorized and meditated. The *pensum* is the day's measure of raw wool: just as the spinner converts it into thread, so the exercitant aligns a fixed number of scriptural verses, converting them into the day's spiritual exercises.⁷²

69 Rule 31, "De cellarario monasterii, qualis sit", in *ibidem* 259–266, esp. 259. On the jurisdiction of the Cistercian cellarer, see France, *Separate but Equal* 90–92, 137.

70 *Ibidem* 258: 'Animam suam custodiat, memor semper illud apostolicum quia "qui bene ministraverit gradum bonum sibi acquirit"'. On the cellarer's custodial obligations, both physical and spiritual, see *ibidem* 262, 268–272.

71 *Ibidem* 257–58: '[Cellarius monasterii] sapiens, maturis moribus, sobrius, non multum edax, non elatus, non turbulentus, non iniuriosus, non tardus, non prodigus, sed timens Deum; qui omni congregationi sit sicut pater. Curam gerat de omnibus'. On Benedict's ideal of the cellarer as father to the entire community, see *ibidem* 259, 261, 269–270.

72 On Jerome's analogies of memory and *cellarium*, prayer and *pensum*, as these relate to the Cistercian obligation of *lectio divina*, see Robertson, *Lectio Divina* 76–81, esp. 79.

Closely related to Benedict's preferment of the cellarer is his conception of the fundamental connection between the oratory as a place of spiritual labor and the kitchen as a place of manual labor. He instructs the weekly servers, before their kitchen service begins, to 'bow before the knees of all in the oratory, begging for prayers'.⁷³ Upon starting their service, they must thrice recite the prayer, 'God, come to my assistance; Lord, hasten to help me', and upon finishing their service, they must thrice recite the prayer, 'Blessed are you, Lord God, for you have aided me and comforted me'.⁷⁴ Benedict, as Kardong stresses, tends to associate or, better, identify the two *loca*—kitchen and oratory—and concomitantly, he folds prayer into the cooking and serving of meals.⁷⁵ By portraying prayer as a spiritual analogue to the preparation of foodstuffs, he implies that the cultivation of the spirit requires as much labor and exertion as the manipulation of comestibles. The handling of materials, in other words, is analogized to the management of spiritual things. Just as the monk is expected to inhabit the Rule as if it were a material place, so conversely, he must learn to internalize the monastery's material spaces, transposing them into places of spiritual habitation. Benedict's approach to the critical nexus of matter and spirit recalls the connection between the oratory and the workshop, adduced by prints such as *The Boy Jesus Reading while the Virgin Sews* [Fig. 16.13]. More generally, close observance of the Rule, in serving as the crucial basis for the Cistercian rule of life, provides the discursive formation that engendered the rich thematic of materiality and the many analogies between reformation of the soul and the processes of cutting, pasting, engraving, and papermaking, so distinctive to the *Paradisus precum selectarum* of Martin Boschman.

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73 Rule 35, "De spetimanariis coquinae", in Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* 288–289: 'Intrantes et exeuntes hebdomadarii in oratorio mox matutinis finitis dominica omnibus genibus provolvantur postulantes pro se orari'. On Benedict's equation of kitchen service to ministry (*ministerium*), see *ibidem* 293.

74 *Ibidem* 288–289: 'Egrediens autem de septimana dicat hunc versum: "Benedictus es, domine Deus", qui "adiuvasti me et consolatus es me"; quo dicto tertio accepta benedictione egrediens, subsequatur ingrediens et dicat: "Deus in adiutorium meum intende [...]". On Benedict's coupling of the terms *ministerium* and *servire*, see *ibidem* 295.

75 *Ibidem*.

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PART 5

Visualizing the Flesh of Christ



Dieu le Père en Vierge Marie La Trinité – Pietà de Rubens

Colette Nativel

L'Incarnation, à l'époque moderne, est le plus souvent abordée en peinture à travers l'Annonciation, l'Adoration ou la Passion. La conception, puis les premiers instants de la vie terrestre de l'Enfant offrent au fidèle deux moments joyeux pour méditer le mystère de l'Incarnation, la Passion et la Crucifixion en montrent l'accomplissement douloureux.

L'association de la Trinité et de l'Incarnation est plus rare et assurément plus complexe à mettre en image: l'Annonciation, l'Adoration et la Passion relèvent du genre narratif, et le peintre peut montrer des figures humaines agissant et exprimant diverses émotions. Pourtant le lien entre l'Incarnation et la Trinité était affirmé très clairement par le *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente* qui commentait en ces termes la formule du *Credo*, "Qui a été conçu du Saint-Esprit": "Et comme le mystère de l'Incarnation est la preuve sans réplique de l'amour immense et particulier que Dieu a pour nous, c'est pour cela que nous l'attribuons spécialement au Saint-Esprit".¹

La Trinité a certes connu toute sorte de représentations plastiques, mais son iconographie fut l'objet de maint débat.² Comment représenter la Trinité dans sa complexe unité? Diverses solutions s'offraient aux artistes, dont plusieurs furent l'objet de vigoureuses condamnations. Ainsi, sans que la papauté n'interdît jamais de représenter la Trinité, furent condamnées, à l'époque moderne, les images, apparues au *xiv^e* siècle, qui la peignaient sous la forme d'une seule tête à trois visages identiques avec trois bouches, trois nez, quatre

1 Nous citons le *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente*, traduit du latin par Mgr E. Marbeau et le chanoine A. Carpentier (Paris: 1978), 1^{ère} part. 'Du symbole des Apôtres', chap. 4. 'Du troisième article du Symbole', §. 1. 'Qui a été conçu du Saint-Esprit' 42. Pour le texte latin, voir *Catechismus romanus, ex decreto Concilii Tridentini et Pii v, [...] jussu primum editus, nunc vero luculentis quaestionibus, quae mox rei propositae materiam oculis subjiciant, distinctus, brevibusque annotatiunculis elucidatus, studio [...] Andreae Fabricii Leodii [...]* (Antverpiae, ex officina C. Plantini: 1587) 33–34.

2 Voir, en particulier, Böespflug Fr., "Le diable et la Trinité tricéphales: à propos d'une pseudo-vision de la Trinité advenue à un novice de saint Norbert de Xanten", *Revue des sciences religieuses* 72/2 (1998) 156–175.

yeux ou par un seul corps à trois têtes (une sorte de cerbère). Le Concile de Trente ne se prononça pas sur cette question. Cependant, le premier commentateur du décret sur les saintes images, le théologien de Louvain, Johannes Molanus (1533–1585), dans le *De Historia SS. imaginum et picturarum pro vero earum usu contra abusum* (*Traité sur les saintes images*), publié à Louvain en 1570, condamne ce type de figuration.³ C'est au pape Benoît XIV qu'il reviendra de condamner, dans la lettre apostolique *Sollicitudini nostrae*,⁴ assez tardivement, en 1745, les Trinités tricéphales ou les représentations du Trône de Grâce dans le ventre des Vierges ouvrantes qui figuraient l'Incarnation. En revanche, il tolère la représentation de la Trinité par trois figures semblables, mais séparées. Enfin, il approuve les images de Dieu le Père conformes à la vision de Daniel—celles d'un Dieu vieillard⁵—du Fils comme un homme et de l'Esprit Saint sous forme d'une colombe ou de langues de feu.⁶

3 Molanus Johannes, *De Picturis et imaginibus sacris liber unus, tractans de vitandis circa eas abusibus et de earundem significationibus* [...] (Lovanii, apud H. Vellaeum: 1570). Le titre change lors de la seconde édition posthume augmentée: *De Historia SS. imaginum et picturarum pro vero earum usu contra abusum, libri IV* [...] (Lovanii, apud J. Bogardum: 1594) 19–21. L'ouvrage de Molanus (Jan Vermeulen ou Jan van der Meulen) fut réédité jusqu'au XVIII^e siècle, en particulier à Anvers, en 1619. Nous utilisons l'édition latine de 1594 et la traduction française: *Traité des saintes images* [...], introduction, traduction, notes et index par Böespflug Fr., Christin O., Tassel B. 2 vols (Paris: 1996) 1, 133–136. Le pape Urbain VIII aurait, le 1^{er} août 1628, proclamé l'interdiction de ces images, mais selon Jan Hallebeek, "Papal Prohibitions Midway between Rigor and Laxity: On the Issue of Depicting the Holy Trinity", in Asselt W. J. van – Geest P. van – Muller D. (eds.), *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm: Struggle for Religious Identity* (Brill: 2007) 372, les Archives Pontificales ne comportent pas de traces de cette décision pourtant mentionnée dans la littérature du XVII^e et XVIII^e.

4 Sur *Sollicitudini Nostrae* (et plus généralement sur l'histoire des images sacrées), voir le magistral ouvrage de Böespflug Fr., *Dieu dans l'art. Sollicitudini Nostrae et l'affaire Crescence de Kaufbeuren* (Paris: 1984).

5 Déjà le *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente*, écrivait, 3^e part. 'Du Décalogue', chap. XXII: 'Du premier commandement', §. VI: 'On peut cependant chez les chrétiens représenter la divinité par des symboles', 285: "C'est ainsi que le Prophète Daniel [Dan. 7. 9] le dépeint 'comme un vieillard (l'ancien des jours) assis sur un trône avec des livres ouverts devant Lui'. Il voulait par là nous représenter son Éternité et cette Sagesse infinie qui considère toutes les pensées et toutes les actions des hommes pour les juger"; (*Catechismus romanus* 300). Voir Böespflug Fr., "Dieu le Père en vieillard dans l'art occidental. Histoire d'une dérive vers l'insignifiance", *Communio*, 23/6–24/1 (1999) 165–178.

6 *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente* 285: "La colombe et les langues de feu qui figurent le Saint-Esprit dans l'Évangile et les Actes des Apôtres indiquent des attributs qui lui sont propres, et qui sont trop familiers à tout le monde pour qu'il soit nécessaire de nous y arrêter plus longtemps"; (*Catechismus romanus* 300).



FIGURE 17.1 *Pieter Paul Rubens, Holy Trinity (1615–1620). Oil on canvas, 158 cm × 152 cm. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten.*

Par bien des aspects, “La Sainte Trinité” (“Heilige Drievuldigheid”) de Rubens [Fig. 17.1]—je donne le titre indiqué par le Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten d’Anvers où le tableau est conservé—, répond à ces exigences. Dieu le Père est représenté comme un vieillard, il tient dans ses bras son Fils mort, tandis qu’une colombe plane au-dessus de sa tête. Rubens propose donc une composition immédiatement compréhensible qui associe clairement Trinité (les trois Personnes) et Incarnation (le Fils mort). Une lecture plus approfondie montrera comment, tout en conciliant les exigences post-tridentines et la tradition médiévale, Rubens aborde la question de l’Incarnation dans ses divers aspects, et d’une manière très complexe.

Il faut d'abord rappeler les conditions de la commande de "La Sainte Trinité", même si celle-ci n'est pas documentée. La dédicace⁷ qui accompagnait le retable indique qu'il fut peint à la demande de Judoca van der Capelle, la veuve de Jan de Pape, un greffier d'Anvers, à la mort de son époux.⁸ Le choix du sujet et la référence à la Crucifixion sont évidemment liés à la destination du tableau, puisque c'est la Crucifixion qui a rendu possible la Rédemption de l'humanité, la Sainte Trinité étant associée à la Rédemption, à la miséricorde et à la vie éternelle. De fait, le retable était destiné à orner l'autel de la Trinité de l'ancienne église des Carmes au pied duquel le couple devait être enseveli. On ignore la date de cette commande et on la situe en général entre 1615 et 1620,⁹ en tout cas avant 1621, année où mourut Judoca van der Capelle.

Une comparaison rapide avec "L'adoration de la Trinité" [Fig. 17.2] que Rubens peignit pour les Gonzague, à Mantoue, permet de mesurer l'originalité de notre image et d'envisager la spécificité de ses significations. "L'adoration de la Trinité" montre la famille Gonzague priant la Sainte Trinité qui apparaît dans le ciel, placée sur une somptueuse draperie dorée tenue par des anges et illuminée par l'Esprit Saint. Le Christ ressuscité est assis à la même hauteur que le Père, l'Esprit se trouvant lui-même, sous forme d'une colombe, entre les têtes du Père et du Fils, pour mieux souligner la triple nature de la Trinité. Le Christ désigne du doigt la famille qu'il recommande à son Père, remplis-

7 La dédicace est la suivante: "Trinitati hoc altare Dicavit tribusque Anniversariis Dotavit D. Judoca Van der Capelle uxor D. Joannis de Pape S. P. Q. A. ab Actis mulier dum fuit nobilis honesta et pia. Obiit anno aetatis XXXIX Christi MDCXXI × April'.

8 Le tableau se trouve actuellement au Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten d'Anvers, c'est une huile sur toile de 158 × 152 cm.

9 Rooses M., *L'œuvre de P.P. Rubens: histoire et description de ses tableaux et dessins*, 5 vol. (Anvers: 1886–1892), vol. 1, 91, le date de 1620; Jaffé M., *Rubens: Catalogo completo* (Milano: 1989), de 1614–1615. On mentionnera pour mémoire Dominique Fromentin qui va jusqu'à y voir une œuvre antérieure au voyage en Italie: *Rubens et Rembrandt: les Maîtres d'autrefois* (Bruxelles – Paris: 1991) 90: "La Trinité, avec son fameux Christ en raccourci, est un tableau de la première jeunesse de Rubens, antérieur à son voyage d'Italie. C'est un joli début, froid, mince, lisse et décoloré, qui déjà contient en germe son style [...]'. On ne peut pas suivre non plus Böespflug Fr., "Pour une histoire iconique du Dieu chrétien [...] une esquisse", in Mayeur J.-M. – Pietri Ch. et L. – Vauchez A. – Venard M. (eds.), *Histoire du christianisme: des origines à nos jours*, vol. 14: *Anamnesis (origines, perspectives, index)* (Paris: 2001) 83–122 (113), qui le date de 1610. La figure du Christ est en effet très proche de celle des *Lamentations* des années 1615–1620. Je pencherais volontiers pour une date un peu avant 1620, en rapprochant la *Trinité* du tableau de la Galerie Médicis mentionné plus bas.



FIGURE 17.2 Pieter Paul Rubens, *Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga and his Family Adoring the Holy Trinity* (1604–1605). Oil on canvas, 381 cm × 477 cm. Mantua, Palazzo ducale.

sant ainsi sa fonction de Rédempteur et d'Intercesseur, selon ce que l'affirme le Catéchisme Romain.¹⁰

10 Voir, par exemple, le *Catéchisme*, 1^{ère} part. “Du symbole des Apôtres”, chap. 7. “Du sixième article du Symbole”, §. III. “Causes et raisons de l'Ascension de Notre- Seigneur”, 69: ‘Or, rien n'est plus propre à inspirer une joie solide et véritable aux Fidèles, que de voir Jésus-Christ devenu le défenseur de leur cause et leur intercesseur dans l'affaire du Salut, Lui qui jouit auprès de son Père d'un pouvoir et d'une faveur sans bornes’, et 4^e part. “De la prière”, chap. 38. “De la Prière en général”, §. VII. “De la préparation à la prière”, 376: ‘C'est ce Médiateur souverain qui se tient sans cesse à notre disposition, Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ, dont Saint Jean a dit [Joan. 2, 14]: “Si quelqu'un a péché, nous avons auprès du Père un Avocat, Jésus-Christ qui est juste; et il est Lui-même propitiation pour nos péchés”. Saint Paul, de son côté, dit aux Romains [Rom., 8, 3]: “Jésus-Christ qui est mort, qui est ressuscité, qui est à la droite de son Père et qui y intercède pour nous”; et puis à Timothée [1Tim. 2, 5]: “Il n'y a qu'un Dieu et un seul Médiateur de Dieu et des hommes, Jésus-Christ, qui est homme”; et enfin aux Hébreux [Héb. 2, 17]: “Il a dû se rendre semblable en toutes choses à ses frères, afin qu'il fût un Pontife miséricordieux et fidèle auprès de Dieu”. Dès lors, quoique indignes par nous-mêmes d'obtenir quelque chose, cependant à cause des

La “Trinité” d’Anvers est bien différente. Dieu le Père, éploré, tient sur ses genoux le corps mort de son Fils qu’il offre à la contemplation du spectateur. Au-dessus de la tête de Dieu vole la colombe du Saint Esprit. À droite et à gauche du triste groupe posé sur une nue grisâtre, deux anges en pleurs portent les attributs de la passion—le fouet de la flagellation, la couronne d’épines, la lance de Longin tenus par l’ange de gauche, les clous de la Crucifixion par celui de droite.

Les divers titres qu’on donne à ce retable—Rooses, “La sainte Trinité avec les anges”, le catalogue du Musée d’Anvers, “De H. Drievuldigheid” (“La sainte Trinité”) ou “Le Trône de Grâce”, le site du Rubenianum, “De Genadestoel” (“Le propitiatoire”) ou (comme le Musée d’Anvers) “De H. Drievuldigheid”—demandent quelques éclaircissements et précisions. Il s’agit d’une Trinité, en effet, et la composition le souligne, qui conduit progressivement le regard du Christ, au Père et à l’Esprit. Si le titre “Le propitiatoire” n’est guère descriptif, il met en évidence un des sens profonds du retable qui évoque le sacrifice du Christ. En revanche, il faut éliminer le titre “Le Trône de Grâce”, en suivant François Boespflug qui distingue deux types de Trinités dans l’art. C’est d’abord, “le Trône de Grâce, *stricto sensu*”, une image qui montre “les figures groupées de Dieu le Père tenant devant lui, souvent sur ses genoux, le Fils sur la croix” et le Saint Esprit [Fig. 17.3].¹¹ Le second type apparaît plus tardivement, à la fin du Moyen Age, et regroupe des images où le Père tient le Fils descendu de croix. Boespflug appelle ces images, dans l’étude qu’il a consacrée à *Dieu dans l’art*, “Piété de Notre-Seigneur”, et, plus récemment, “Compassion de la Trinité”.¹² La

mérites infinis de notre divin Médiateur et Intercesseur, de Jésus-Christ, nous devons espérer, avec une confiance entière, que Dieu voudra bien nous accorder tout ce que nous Lui demanderons de légitime par son entremise’.

- 11 Boespflug Fr. – Zaluska Y., “Le dogme trinitaire et l’essor de son iconographie en Occident de l’époque carolingienne au IV^e Concile du Latran (1215)”, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 147 (1994) 203, les auteurs discutent la définition du Trône de Grâce que donne Pearman, S.J., *The Iconographic Development of the Cruciform Throne of Grâce from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve, 1974): ‘S. Pearman en dénombre quatorze dans son catalogue systématique, mais elle compte, outre les Trônes de Grâce *stricto sensu*, les “Crucifixions trinitaires”, c’est-à-dire les crucifix et Crucifixions avec un Père en buste et une Colombe; nous préférons une définition plus stricte [...] définition qui interdit d’appeler Trône de Grâce les images de la fin du moyen âge où le Père tient le Fils descendu de croix’.
- 12 Boespflug, “Pour une histoire iconique du Dieu chrétien [...] une esquisse” 112–113: ‘Plutôt que de maintenir l’usage d’une expression contestable, nous proposons de continuer à sérier les types iconographiques en distinguant Trône de Grâce et Compassion du Père, et de parler de Compassion de la Trinité’. Voir *idem*, “La compassion de Dieu le Père



FIGURE 17.3 *Austrian, The Trinity with Christ Crucified (ca. 1410). Egg tempera on silver fir, 118.1 × 114.9 cm. London, The National Gallery.*

Trinité de Rubens appartient à cette seconde catégorie. Je propose un titre légèrement différent, “Trinité-Pietà”. L’étude qui suit expliquera pourquoi.

Les représentations de la Trinité montrant Dieu le Père qui tient le Christ mort, la colombe du Saint-Esprit planant au-dessus d’eux, très populaires dans toute l’Europe entre 1300 et 1500, se raréfierent au XVII^e siècle. La lecture de Molanus apporte une explication à cette progressive disparition. Le théologien

dans l’art occidental (XIII^e–XVII^e siècle)”, *Revue d’éthique et de théologie morale* 172—*Le Supplément* (Mars 1990), 124–157; et idem, “La [Com]passion de la Trinité dans l’art flamand du xv^e siècle”, in Guesché A. (dir.), *Dieu à l’épreuve de notre cri* (Paris – Louvain: 1999) 45–67.

flamand évoque très précisément l'iconographie de la "Trinité-Pietà" qui nous intéresse ici, et de façon très concrète:

Un savant pasteur m'a consulté par lettre depuis Anvers sur une image de la Trinité [...] Elle montrait le corps mort et nu du Christ, allongé en travers et soutenu par les bras du père. La seule réponse qui pouvait lui être faite était qu'il devait demander un arrêt de l'ordinaire [...] J'ajoutai ensuite que, pour ma part, je n'approuvais pas cette image tant parce qu'elle n'appartenait pas aux habitudes de l'Église de Dieu, que parce que le Christ ne s'était jamais manifesté sous l'apparence d'un corps mort, même si je sais que sa divinité n'a pas été séparée de son corps mort.¹³

Ce texte a souvent été commenté à partir de différents points de vue. Émile Mâle souligne l'abandon des cultes franciscains—'Ainsi', écrit-il, 'les images que la dévotion franciscaine avait multipliées depuis trois siècles sont rejetées avec une sorte d'indignation'.¹⁴ Pour David Freedberg,¹⁵ cette remarque est un bon exemple de la mise en œuvre des règles édictées par le Concile de Trente. Les éditeurs de la version française du traité soulignent enfin très justement la perspective de Molanus: s'il voit dans cette image une image inhabituelle, c'est qu'il se fonde sur la longue durée. Et de fait cette iconographie, très fréquente à partir du XIV^e siècle, ne se rencontre pas dans les iconographies antérieures.

Parmi les "modèles" que Rubens a sans doute à l'esprit pour sa composition, on a souvent évoqué l'estampe de Dürer [Fig. 17.4]. On peut penser aussi à celle de Maarten van Heemskerck [Fig. 17.5]. Ces rapprochements sont, cependant, un peu rapides car la posture du Christ presque allongé, la tête tombant sur son bras gauche posé sur la jambe du Père couverte par le linceul, est très

13 Molanus, *Traité* 521–522; *De Historia* 4, 16, fol. 187: 'Praeterea consuluit me litteris, ex Antuerpia scriptis, doctus quidem Pastor, de imagine Trinitatis Ecclesiae suae data, num erigenda esset et, eo quod in sinu Patris exprimeret nudum et mortuum corpus Christi, transuersim positum, et brachiis Patris hinc inde sustentatum. Cui in primis respondendum fuit, decisionem ab Ordinario petendam esse, cum Synodi Tridentinae, decretum sit, nemini licere vlllo in loco, vel Ecclesia, etiam quomodolibet exempta vllam insolita ponere, vel ponendam curare imaginem, nisi ab Episcopo approbata fuerit. Deinde adieci, me eam Imaginem non probare, tum quia in Ecclesia Dei inusitata est, tum quia Christus nusquam in specie mortui corporis apparuisse legitur, etsi sciam diuinitatem eius a corpore mortuo separatam non fuisse'.

14 Mâle É., *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France. Étude sur l'iconographie du Moyen Age et sur ses sources d'inspiration*, 2^e éd., rev. et augm. (Paris: 1922) 493.

15 Freedberg D., *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1566–1609* (New York: 1988) 164.



FIGURE 17.4 Albrecht Dürer, *The Holy Trinity* (1511). Woodcut on paper, 39.4 × 28.1 cm.



FIGURE 17.5 Jacob Matham after Martin van Heemskerck, The Trinity (1602). Engraving, 29.7 × 22 cm.



FIGURE 17.6 Baccio Bandinelli, *Dead Christ Supported by Nicodemus* (ca. 1555). Florence, *Santissima Annunziata*.

différente de celle choisie par Dürer ou Heemskerck. Bien plus, les deux artistes présentent un Dieu majestueux, coiffé d'une tiare. Nu tête, le Dieu de Rubens donne un caractère plus humain à la scène.

On n'a jamais, à ma connaissance, évoqué la "Pietà" de Baccio Bandinelli [Fig. 17.6].¹⁶ Or cette "Pietà" a suffisamment impressionné Rubens pour qu'il s'en inspire dans "Le mariage par procuration de Marie de Médicis"¹⁷ [Fig. 17.7]

16 Baccio Bandinelli, "Pietà", 1554–1559, Marbre, Santissima Annunziata, Florence.

17 On n'a pas souvent remarqué non plus que cette *Pietà* se trouvait (et se trouve toujours) dans la basilique de la Santissima Annunziata à Florence et que Rubens l'a déplacée pour la placer dans l'église Santa Maria dei Fiori (certainement avec l'accord de Marie, mais cela est encore une autre question). Il ne peut s'agir d'une erreur, puisqu'il connaissait Florence et qu'il avait assisté au mariage de Marie. On peut aussi supposer, sans trop de hardiesse, qu'il avait dessiné cette œuvre lors de ce séjour, comme il le faisait habituellement. Seule, à ma connaissance, Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria De' Medici* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978) 150–155, a discuté cette question à laquelle elle apporte plusieurs explications plausibles.



FIGURE 17.7 *Pieter Paul Rubens, The Wedding by Proxy of Marie de' Medici to King Henry IV (1622–1624). Oil on canvas, 394 × 295 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.*

qu'il peignit pour la galerie du Luxembourg, au début des années 1620.¹⁸ Cette "Pietà", comme la "Pietà" Bandini de Michel-Ange, ne représente pas Dieu le Père, mais Nicodème.¹⁹ Il n'y a sans doute aucun lien sémantique entre le retable d'Anvers et la sculpture peinte pour la Galerie. Ce qui intéresse Rubens dans la "Pietà" de Bandinelli semble être d'ordre plastique. Bien plus, le Dieu de la "Trinité-Pietà" de Rubens a un caractère si humain que nous pourrions prendre le vieil homme pour Joseph d'Arimathie ou Nicodème. Cette figure a même choqué Max Rooses qui formule ce jugement sévère—et bien injuste—à son endroit: 'Dieu le Père manque totalement de dignité, il est d'une vulgarité extrême et sans valeur picturale'.²⁰ Deux détails le révèlent au spectateur: le halo de lumière qui entoure sa tête, la seule lumière dans le ciel sombre, et, au-dessus de sa tête, un peu à sa droite, sous la forme d'une colombe blanche, l'Esprit Saint, qui vient compléter la Trinité. Nous sommes loin des Trônes de Grâce où Dieu le Père, majestueusement assis, coiffé de la tiare, offre son Fils crucifié à voir au spectateur.

La disposition des figures est celle d'une Pietà. Cette représentation de la Trinité en Pietà—Dieu le Père tient son Fils mort sur ses genoux—évoque implicitement la figure de la Vierge. Certes, cette disposition est loin d'être réservée à la Vierge Marie. Nous venons d'évoquer la "Pietà" de Bandinelli et celle de Michel-Ange où Nicodème soutient le Christ mort. Il ne s'agit pas ici de soulever la question chère aux *gender studies* d'une féminité de Dieu le Père et je suis, sur ce point encore, les judicieuses et polémiques remarques de Boespflug sur cette question.²¹ Cependant, plusieurs éléments invitent à rapprocher la figure de Dieu le Père et celle de la Vierge. D'abord, les Compassions du Père se font plus rares, me semble-t-il, au XVII^e siècle et l'œil du spectateur est sans doute alors plus accoutumé aux Pietà où la Vierge tient son Fils. Un second élément est particulièrement remarquable. Ce sont les gestes de Dieu le Père. Boespflug, qui mentionne ce retable quand il traite de la Compassion de Dieu le Père, souligne les gestes un peu théâtraux de désolation et d'admonition que Rubens lui prête et qui invitent le fidèle à méditer sur la Passion et la Rédemption.²² J'ajouterai que ces gestes évoquent directement ceux de la Vierge des Adorations et des Lamentations. Dieu soulève le linceul de sa main

18 C'est une des raisons pour lesquelles je pense que notre retable a dû être peint vers 1620.

19 Sur l'iconographie complexe de la Pietà, voir Greve D., *Status und Statue: Studien zu Leben und Werk des Florentiner Bildhauers Baccio Bandinelli* (Berlin: 2008) 297–323.

20 Rooses 1, 90.

21 Boespflug Fr., "Dieu en mère?: féminité et maternité de la figure de Dieu le père dans l'art médiéval d'Occident (XI^e–XV^e siècle)", *Revue des sciences religieuses* (2009) 49–69.

22 Boespflug, "La compassion de Dieu le Père dans l'art occidental" 150.

gauche et offre son fils mort à la vue du spectateur, sa main droite appelant le chrétien à méditer les souffrances de son Fils. Le mouvement de la main droite est d'ailleurs souligné par son regard désolé qui suit la même direction vers le spectateur. Ces gestes sont similaires à ceux de la Vierge Marie montrant l'Enfant Jésus dans les Adorations [Fig. 17.8] et les plaies de son fils mort dans les Lamentations, comme dans le "Triptyque Michielsen" [Fig. 17.9]. Ces gestes simples construisent une narration en rappelant la naissance de Jésus alors qu'est montré le corps mort du Christ—they résument ainsi le mystère de l'Incarnation. Il ne s'agit pas, répétons-le, de donner un caractère féminin au vieillard représenté, mais de rappeler le rôle de la Vierge dans l'Incarnation. Si la figure de Dieu éploré a perdu en majesté, la compassion qu'il éprouve souligne encore l'Incarnation: il souffre comme le Fils, de la même façon que la Vierge souffrait au pied de la croix.

On peut, peut-être, aller plus loin et se demander si ces gestes ne soulèvent pas une des questions les plus débattues de l'Église, depuis saint Augustin, celle du statut de co-Rédemptrice accordé par certains à la Vierge. Le concile de Trente était resté silencieux sur ce point. Or, ce tableau, nous l'avons dit, était destiné à l'église des carmes d'Anvers, un ordre voué à la Vierge, comme son nom complet l'indique—les Frères de Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel. Sans doute en réponse à la réforme thérésienne qui vit la fondation de l'ordre des Carmes déchaux, les Grands Carmes se réformèrent aussi. En 1624, la réforme de l'ordre élaborée en France par Henri Sylvius renouera de façon éclatante avec la tradition mariale de l'ordre.²³ Un des réformateurs français, Jean de Saint-Samson (1571–1636), expose de façon très claire le statut particulier de Marie dans ses *Contemplations*. Méditant sur la double nature divine et terrestre du Christ, il écrit dans la "contemplation xxxv":²⁴

[...] comme Dieu infiny vous estes Fils eternel, eternellement engendré de Dieu vostre Pere: Et comme Dieu-homme vous estes Fils aussi eternel de vostre Mere, en vostre veuë & vostre decret eternel, qui dans le temps auez deu estre conceu & engendré d'elle par l'operation du Saint Esprit. Comme donc en nostre nature personnellement vnüe à la vostre diuine, vous estes vrayment Fils de Dieu vostre Père: de mesme en nostre nature qui est celle de vostre Mere, vnüe à la vostre diuine, vous estes vrayment Fils de Marie.

23 Voir Janssen Le Père P.W., O.C., *Les origines de la réforme des Carmes en France au XVII^e siècle* [...] (La Haye: 1963).

24 Jean de Saint-Samson, *Les Contemplations et les divins soliloques* (Paris, D. Thierry: 1654).



FIGURE 17.8 *Pieter Paul Rubens, Adoration of the Shepherds (1611). Oil on canvas, 404.5 × 296.5 cm. Antwerp, Sint-Pauluskerk.*



FIGURE 17.9 *Pieter Paul Rubens, Epitaph of Jan Michielsens and his Wife Maria Maes (1618). Oil on wood, 138 × 178 cm. Antwerp, Museum voor Schone Kunsten.*

Il évoque ensuite le statut spécial de Marie qui, parce qu'elle est la Mère du Sauveur, est aussi Rédemptrice:

Partant elle est Mere de Dieu; mais de Dieu-homme Sauueur des hommes: à la redemption & au salut desquels elle a plus excellement & hautement participé en plenitude de grace consommée & de fruition de tout vous, que tout vous, que tout le reste de vos tres-chers & tres saints Eleus. Elle va donc jouïr de vous & comme Fils eternel de son Pere, & comme de son Fils temporel, Dieu-homme; De sorte qu'il y a beaucoup plus de difference tant en grace qu'en gloire, entre l'estat de joiïssance qu'elle a de vous, & celuy des autres Saints, qu'il n'y en a entre la Reyne & les Princes d'un Royaume.

Les *Contemplations* ne sont pas datées, les œuvres de Jean de Saint-Samson n'ayant été publiées qu'en 1654, assez longtemps après sa mort. On peut seulement dire qu'elles ont été écrites, ou plutôt dictées, Jean de Saint-Samson étant aveugle, dans le premier tiers du XVII^e siècle. Néanmoins, ce texte devait être cité car il témoigne très précisément de la mystique mariale des Carmes que traduit le retable de Rubens. À n'en pas douter, les gestes de Dieu le Père,

en évoquant discrètement le lien entre la Vierge et la Trinité, permettaient aux Carmes de réaffirmer leur dévotion, voire de rappeler la doctrine de la co-rédemption. Attribuer à Dieu le Père les gestes de la Vierge permettait de proposer une image acceptable après la condamnation des Vierges Ouvrantes par Molanus qui, justement, appuyait sa censure sur un texte de Gerson mentionnant la présence d'une vierge ouvrière chez des Carmes.²⁵

L'Incarnation est aussi figurée, dans cette "Trinité-Pietà", par le Christ mort. Représenté grandeur nature ou presque—le tableau mesure 1m58 de haut et le corps du Christ, en raccourci, occupe près des deux tiers du champ—il est étendu sur les genoux du Père. La vue *da sotto in sù* conduit le regard du spectateur de ses pieds troués à son visage sanglant. Tout dans cette scène dit l'humanité du Christ: les plaies béantes à ses pieds, à ses mains, à son côté droit, comme le linceul blanc qui souligne sa carnation cadavérique et fait office de *perizonium*. Ce linceul—*perizonium*, tout en cachant la nudité du Christ, évoque l'Incarnation et permet à Rubens de *narrer* dans cette image la vie terrestre de Jésus, en même temps qu'il offre au spectateur un support de méditation sur l'Incarnation, la Trinité et la Rédemption.

La figure du Christ a souvent été comparée au Christ peint par Mantegna pour la "Lamentation sur le Christ mort" [Fig. 17.10].²⁶ Rubens avait certainement vu à Mantoue cette toile, alors en possession des Gonzague, ou une de ses nombreuses copies. Dans une sorte d'émulation avec le grand maître de la perspective, tout en adoptant le raccourci qui place devant les yeux du spectateur (à leur hauteur peut-être) les pieds percés du Christ, Rubens fait tourner le corps du Christ qui était sur la médiatrice pour le placer sur la diagonale. De plus, il ne l'allonge pas sur une pierre d'onction horizontale, mais il l'élève sur les genoux du Père, dans une posture qui souligne la dislocation de ses épaules. Cette vue *da sotto in sù* organise, nous l'avons dit plus haut, le parcours visuel du spectateur, en même temps qu'elle contribue au pathétique de la scène.

Une seconde particularité de cette figure est particulièrement frappante: la laideur du Christ. C'est un des reproches que Descamps adressait déjà à ce tableau.²⁷ De fait, le corps du Christ est noirâtre, le sang coule sur ses bras et ses mains, ses extrémités sont bleues, comme d'ailleurs dans plusieurs

25 Gerson Jean, *Sermo de Nativitate Domini*, in *Quarta et nuper conquistata pars operum Joannis de Gerson Parrhisiarum* [...] (Basileae, in officina Adami Petri: 1518), fol. 47a.

26 Rooses, 1, 90.

27 Descamps Jean Baptiste, *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant, avec des réflexions relativement aux arts & quelques gravures; augmentée de la Vie des plusieurs peintres flamands, Rubens, Van Dyck, de Crayer, & plusieurs autres* (Amsterdam, J. Moris: 1772) 158: 'le Christ est bien en raccourci, mais la tête est peu belle, elle est sans noblesse'.



FIGURE 17.10 *Andrea Mantegna, Dead Christ (ca. 1490). Tempera on canvas, 68 × 81 cm. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera.*

Lamentations de Rubens—le triptyque Michielsens en est encore un bon exemple. Bien plus, le visage du Christ apparaît déformé—son nez est presque brisé, ses yeux sont cernés, ses cheveux épars sont souillés du sang qui coule sur son front et forme un gros caillot, ses lèvres sont bleuâtres. Cette laideur est un cas unique dans le corpus rubénien. Nous sommes loin des crucifiés athlétiques issus de la statuaire antique [Fig. 17.11], des visages encore beaux, malgré le sang qui les souille, des Christ des Lamentations.

Cette peinture du Christ, enlaidi par les coups reçus et la souffrance, semble d'abord dictée par un souci de vraisemblance. Dans les Lamentations contemporaines de la “Trinité-Pietà” que peint Rubens, on constate qu’il porte sur le corps du Christ mort ce que j’appellerais volontiers un ‘coup d’œil médical’. Un texte peu connu d’Adrien de Valois témoigne des exigences de vraisemblance manifestées par certains spectateurs au XVII^e siècle.²⁸ Dans les *Valesiana*,

28 Adrien de Valois (Valesius) (1607–1692) était historiographe du roi. *Valesiana, ou Les pensées critiques, historiques et morales et les poésies latines de monsieur de Valois [...] recueil lies par monsieur de Valois son fils* (Paris, F. et P. Delaulne: 1694).



FIGURE 17.11 *Pieter Paul Rubens, Christ on the Cross (1612). Oil on wood, 145.3 × 91.8 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.*

son fils rapporte que Valois formulait cette critique à l'égard des Crucifixions peintes par les artistes contemporains:

De tous les excellens Peintres anciens et modernes, il n'y en a pas un jusqu'à présent qui ait réussi à représenter comme il faut Nôtre Seigneur en Croix. Ils ont crû faire merveille de donner un coloris de chair mourante sans aucune playe que celles du côté, des pieds et des mains, en quoy ils se sont grandement trompez. Car quand Nôtre Seigneur fut attaché en Croix, il venoit d'être flagellé cruellement par tout le corps, et l'avoit par consequent tout déchiré de coups et tout en sang. Car le tems qu'il fut à porter sa Croix du lieu où il avoit été flagellé jusqu'au Calvaire, n'étant pas suffisant pour fermer des playes si récentes, il est incontes-table que quand les Juifs l'attachèrent en croix son corps étoit encore tout couvert de playes et de sang depuis les pieds jusqu'à la tête. Il est donc ridicule de représenter Jésus-Christ mourant en Croix avec une chair pâle et jaunâtre, comme pourroit être celle d'une personne qui meurt dans son lit. Puisque son corps étoit déchiré et que son sang couloit de tous les côtes, pourquoi le représenter sans blessures?

Valois, qui ne connaissait sans doute pas les Christ morts peints par Rubens, soulève un problème important: comment montrer le corps souffrant du Christ de façon vraisemblable sans pour autant heurter trop vivement la sensibilité du spectateur? Il conclut d'ailleurs sa critique par ces mots: 'Il est vray que cela paroitraît nouveau à bien des gens, et feroit même horreur, mais cependant voilà la seule maniere dont il faudroit le peindre'.

Cette exigence de vraisemblance, très sensible au XVII^e siècle, se double de recherches médicales sur les causes de la mort du Christ—hémorragie, étouffement, etc. On peut mentionner, en se limitant à l'Europe du Nord, le débat suscité par Thomas Bartholin, célèbre médecin de la cour du Danemark, mais aussi mathématicien et théologien, qui écrivit sur les causes physiologiques de la mort du Crucifié. Son *De latere Christi* suscita une réponse de Bartoldus Nihusius, *De Cruce epistola ad Thomam Bartolinum*, à laquelle répondit le *De Cruce Christi Hypomnemata IV* de Bartholin.²⁹

29 Bartholin Thomas (1616–1680), *De Latere Christi aperto dissertatio. Accedunt Cl. Salmasii et aliorum de Cruce epistolae* (Lugduni Batavorum, ex officina J. Maire: 1646); Nihus Bartold (1589–1657), *De Cruce epistola ad Thomam Bartolinum: est Anticritici, anno MDCXLIV vulgati, prosequutio* (Coloniae Ubiorum, apud Jodocum Kalcovium, [Amsterdam]:1647); Bartholin, *De Cruce Christi Hypomnemata IV. I. De Sedili medio. II. De Vino myrrhato. III. De Corona spinea. IV. De Sudore sanguineo* (Hafniae, ex officina M. Martzan: 1651); Bartholin,

Si la description du corps souffrant du Christ par Valois et les recherches des médecins trouvent un écho dans la peinture de Rubens, il est aussi remarquable que ce ‘coup d’œil médical’ ne consiste pas seulement dans la recherche d’un effet de réel. La production des retables de Rubens est aussi, bien évidemment, tributaire des dévotions pratiquées dans les Flandres et sert de support à l’exégèse visuelle. Nous retrouvons dans cette “Trinité-Pietà” les caractéristiques qu’Émile Mâle³⁰ relevait dans l’iconographie religieuse du xv^e siècle:

La plupart des œuvres qui nous restent de cette époque sont sombres et tragiques; l’art ne nous offre plus que l’image de la douleur et de la mort. Jésus n’enseigne plus, il souffre: ou plutôt il semble nous proposer ses plaies et son sang comme l’enseignement suprême. Ce que nous allons rencontrer désormais, c’est Jésus nu, sanglant, couronné d’épines, ce sont les instruments de sa Passion, c’est son cadavre étendu sur les genoux de sa mère; ou bien, dans une chapelle obscure, nous apercevrons deux hommes qui le mettent au tombeau, pendant que des femmes s’efforcent de retenir leurs larmes [...]. Le christianisme se présente désormais sous son aspect pathétique. Assurément la Passion n’a jamais cessé d’en être le centre: mais auparavant la mort de Jésus-Christ était un dogme qui s’adressait à l’intelligence, maintenant, c’est une image émouvante qui parle au cœur.

La méditation que propose la “Trinité—Pietà” de Rubens répond à ces exigences et s’inscrit dans cette tradition. De fait, la période post-tridentine se caractérise par un renouveau du mysticisme à l’intérieur duquel la Passion joue un rôle central. Une des sources de ce mysticisme est Brigitte de Suède, une mystique du xiv^e siècle, justement, dont *Les Révélations Célestes* furent très souvent rééditées, citées et commentées au xvii^e. Ainsi, elle est constamment mentionnée par le franciscain Jean de Carthagène dans ses homélies,³¹ par

De Cruce Christi hypomnemata IV [...]—Bartoldi Nihusii de Cruce epistola ad Thomam Bartholinum. Nicolai Fontani responsum ad propositam sibi quaestionem an manus, clavis transfixae, pares ferendo corpori inde pendulo (Amstelodami, sumptibus A. Frisii: 1670).

30 Mâle, *L’art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France* 86. Émile Mâle, après avoir été fort sévère à propos de l’art religieux du xvii^e siècle, ‘On voit que le christianisme passionné des mystiques, le christianisme qui venait du cœur, ne touche pas plus Molanus que le christianisme qui sortait de l’imagination, le naïf christianisme du peuple’, revint, avec une rare honnêteté sur cette appréciation, dans la préface de *L’art religieux de la fin du xvi^e siècle, du xvii^e siècle, du xviii^e siècle* [...] (Paris, 1972).

31 Cartagena Juan de, *Homiliae catholicae de sacris arcanis Deiparae Mariae et Josephi [...]* (Coloniae Agrippinae, sumptibus B. Gualteri: 1613).

Mallonio dans l'édition du *De Jesu Christi stigmatibus sacrae Sidoni impressis* d'Alfonso Paleotti,³² pour ne citer que ces deux exemples. Brigitte évoque l'Incarnation en mettant ces mots dans la bouche du Christ:

Je suis né et j'ai été circoncis. J'ai subi diverses tribulations et peines. J'ai ouï patiemment les injures et les opprobres. J'ai été prisonnier, flagellé, lié avec des cordes et serré comme dans une presse; mes nerfs étaient distendus; mes veines se rompaient; toutes mes jointures étaient rompues. Puis, mon crâne et toute ma tête étaient déchirés par les piqûres des épines; le sang qui coulait, coagulé, enlaidissait mon visage et ma barbe; ma bouche et ma langue étaient pareillement imprégnées de sang. Mes gencives s'enflaient sous les coups. Puis je fus étendu sur la croix. Mon cou n'eut plus où s'appuyer, si ce n'est mes épaules. Mes bras étaient tirés par des cordes aux trous du bois. Mes pieds, tirés vers le bas et percés par deux clous, n'avaient d'autre soutien que les clous. Tout mon intérieur était sec et contracté. Mon cœur était plein de douleur, d'autant plus qu'il était d'une nature très délicate et excellente, c'est pourquoi elle allait des nerfs au cœur et du cœur retournait au cœur, et ainsi ma douleur s'augmentait et ma mort se prolongeait [...] Or, étant en de telles douleurs et étant en un si grand malheur, mon cœur éclata enfin sous la violence de la douleur, et l'âme sortait. Celle-ci sortie, ma tête se souleva un peu, et tous les membres se raidirent. Mes yeux apparaissaient à moitié, mes pieds soutenaient tout le poids du corps, et j'étais suspendu, déformé, comme un lambeau.³³

32 Paleotti Alfonso – Mallonio Daniele, *Historia admiranda de Jesu Christi stigmatibus sacrae sindoni impressis, ab Alphonso Paleoto, archiepiscopo II. Bononiensi explicata. Figuris aeneis, quaestionibus, contemplationibus, & meditationibus piissimis illustrata. Cum universa passiones seriae, mysteriis & sacratissimae virginis Deiparae egonibus, ut latius pagina versa docet. Auctore R. P. F. Daniele Mallonio divinarum literarum Bononiae publico professore* (Duaci, ex typographia Baltazaris Belleri: 1607). Mallonio s'appuie systématiquement sur les *Revelationes* pour illustrer chaque détail de la Passion.

33 Les éditions de Brigitte de Suède (1302–1373) au XVII^e furent fréquentes dans toute l'Europe. Elles furent traduites en français: *Les Révélationes célestes et divines de Scte Brigitte de Suède, communément appelée la Chère Espouse, divisées en huit livres* [...] *traduites par M^e Jacques Ferraige* (Paris, Jean de Heuqueville: 1624), "Livre des Révélationes Extravagantes", 896–897. Pour le texte latin, nous citons les *Revelationes S. Brigittae, olim a Card. Turrecremata recognitae, nunc a Consalvo Duranto* [...] *notis illustratae* [...] (Romae, apud S. Paulinum: 1606) 824–825: 'Ego natus sum et circumcisis. Ego habui tribulationes varias et labores. Ego audiui verba pessima et obprobria. Captivatus sum et flagellatus, funibus ligatus sum et quasi in prelo punitus, nerui distendebantur, vene rumpebantur,

Cette description, d'une précision et d'une violence extrêmes, arrive, de façon remarquable, après un rappel du lien entre l'Incarnation et de la Rédemption:

Je suis celui qui a été envoyé, avec celui qui envoyait, aux flancs de la Sainte Vierge, qui a pris chair et qui est né. Mais pourquoi? Certainement afin de montrer par paroles et par actes la foi. Puis je suis mort pour ouvrir le ciel. Puis, enseveli, je ressuscitai et je viendrai faire le jugement.³⁴

La "Trinité-Pietà" de Rubens s'inscrit dans un contexte de dolorisme mystique proche de celui que Brigitte exprimait déjà. La traduction en latin, en 1549, de la tragédie de Grégoire de Nazianze, *Christus patiens* (*La passion du Christ*),³⁵ semble avoir joué un rôle important chez les Catholiques, aussi bien que chez les Protestants. Ainsi, pour se limiter à la production littéraire contemporaine de Rubens, on peut citer la tragédie *Christus patiens* (*La passion du Christ*) d'Hugo Grotius,³⁶ le livre de méditation *Christus patiens piis exercitationibus illustratus* (*La passion du Christ illustrée par des exercices de piété*) du jésuite

iuncture omnes dissoluebantur. Inde vertex meus et caput meum totum puncturis spinarum lacerabatur. Sanguis defluens coagulatus deturpabat faciem totam et barbam. Os et lingua similiter inficiebantur sanguine. Gingivae tumenscuntur intumescebant. Inde extensus sum in cruce. Collum meum non habuit reclinatorium nisi humeros meos. Brachia mea ad foramina stipitis funibus trahebantur. Pedes deorsum trahi et duobus clavis perfossi non habebant aliud sustentaculum nisi clavos. Interiora mea omnia arida et contracta fuerunt. Cor meum plenum erat dolore, quod quia recentissime erat nature et optime, ideo dolor quandoque de nervis exiit ad cor et iterum a corde ad nervos, et sic augmentabatur dolor et prolongabatur mors [...] Me autem in tali dolore stante et in tanto ve perseuerante, tandem cor crepuit pre violencia passionis et anima egrediebatur, qua egressa caput se modicum eleuauit, omnia membra contremuerunt. Oculi quasi ad medium aperiebantur, pedes sustentabant totum pondus corporis, et pendebam quasi pannus deformis'.

34 Brigitte de Suède, *Les Révélationes célestes et divines* 896; *Revelationes* 824: 'Ego sum, qui cum eo, qui mittebat, missus sum in viscera virginea et assumpsi carnem et natus sum. Sed ad quid? Certe ut ostenderem verbis et factis fidem. Inde mortuus sum, ut aperirem celum. Inde sepultus resurrexi, et venturus sum iudicare'.

35 Grégoire de Nazianze, [...] *Tragœdia Christus patiens. Nunc primum latinitate donata, multisque locis à mendis, quibus antea scatebat repurgata*, Gabriele Garcia Tarraconensi interprete (Parisii, Christianus Wechelus: 1549) ou *Tragœdia Christus patiens, latino carmine reddita per Franciscum Fabricium* (Antverpiae, in aedibus J. Steelsii: 1550). Voir Grégoire de Nazianze, *La Passion du Christ*, ed. André Tuilier (Paris: 1969).

36 Grotius Hugo, *Tragœdia Christus patiens* (Monachii, ab hæredibus Ioannis Hertsroy & Cornelio Leysserio: 1627).

flamand Charles Scribani³⁷ ou enfin les *Élégies* de Sidronius Hosschius.³⁸ La dévotion envers la Vierge (qui l'a guéri miraculeusement) et la Passion du Sauveur sont les deux sujets qu'Hosschius aborde le plus souvent, comme dans cette *Élégie* (IV, 15) où le jésuite invite à méditer sur la passion à partir d'une image de l'homme de douleur. Elle s'intitule *Memoriam vulnerum Christi retinendam* (*Il faut garder la mémoire des plaies du Christ*).

Toi qui, les yeux fixés sur cette triste image, contemples
 Et dénombre les blessures que Dieu a souffert pour toi,
 Jamais tu n'en pourras compter autant qu'il en reçut sur son corps
 Lacéré, car aucun art ne saurait en peindre le nombre.
 Mais il en est qui saisissent l'âme, et intensément retiennent
 Le regard et se font remarquer chacune en son lieu.
 Vois la plaie béante qui déchire sa poitrine,
 Vois les larges blessures de ses mains, de ses pieds:
 Celles-là ne cicatriseront pas, elles resteront ouvertes
 Tant que durera Celui qui en mourant les reçut.³⁹

Cette *Élégie* illustre bien la fonction de l'image: l'image du corps martyrisé du Christ sert de support à la méditation du fidèle qui doit aller au-delà de ce qu'il voit, l'image ne pouvant rendre la réalité indicible de la Passion.

37 Scribanus Charles, *Christus patiens* [...] *piis exercitationibus illustratus* [...] (Antverpiae, apud M. Nutium: 1629). Charles Scribanus (1561–1629) fut le premier recteur du collège d'Anvers (1598–1612), avant de devenir Provincial de Flandres (1613–1619), puis recteur à Bruxelles (1619–1625).

38 Sur Sidronius Hosschius, S.J., professeur dans les collèges de la Compagnie de Jésus, auteur de nombreuses poésies en langue latine, voir Sacré D. (ed.), *Sidronius Hosschius (Merkem 1596–Tongeren 1653): jezuiët en Latijns Dichter* (Kortrijk: 1996).

39 Hosschius Sidronius, *Elegiarum libri sex. Item Guilielmi Becani* [...] *Idyllia et elegiae* [...] (Lovanii apud Æ. Denique: 1690) 154–155:

Si quis es, in tristi qui fixus imagine spectas,
 Quæ tulerit pro te vulnera, quotque Deus,
 In lacero nunquam tot vulnera corpore cernes,
 Quot tulit, ars numerum pingere nulla potest.
 At sunt, quæ rapiant animos, penitusque morentur
 Lumina, quæque suo sunt speciosa loco.
 Aspice quam lato patefactum pectus hiatu,
 Quantaque sint manuum vulnera, quanta pedum.
 Illa cicatricem non sunt ductura; patebunt
 Donec qui moriens illa recepit, erit.

Je remercie très vivement Pierre Laurens, de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, d'avoir traduit ces vers.

La laideur que prête Rubens au Fils de Dieu fait homme est la marque de la Passion, condition nécessaire du Salut, et donc de l'Incarnation. De la même façon, si Dieu le Père a perdu sa beauté hiératique, trop humain peut-être dans sa compassion aux souffrances du Fils qu'il porte dans ses bras, c'est qu'il souffre la même douleur que Marie au pied de la Croix.

Il est sans doute difficile d'affirmer quels textes précis Rubens ou, surtout, ses commanditaires avaient à l'esprit quand fut peint ce retable, d'autant plus que Brigitte de Suède, par exemple, est citée dans une très grande quantité d'ouvrages théologiques publiés pendant la première moitié du XVII^e siècle. Cependant, les éléments que nous avons rappelés sont bien présents. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'illustrer un texte (qui d'ailleurs n'existe pas dans les Écritures), mais, en suivant une démarche typologique, d'inciter le spectateur à méditer sur les sens de la l'Incarnation, de la Passion du Christ, de la Rédemption.

Rubens s'appuie sur l'ancienne tradition des images de dévotion flamandes qu'il renouvelle à la lumière des pratiques de méditation modernes. Il transforme la lecture exégétique en condensant dans un espace unique ce qui était souvent réparti dans des diptyques ou des triptyques. L'image ainsi conçue donne à voir le mystère de l'Incarnation. La rhétorique visuelle que Rubens utilise sert d'appui à la méditation du fidèle en figurant de façon sensible les dogmes complexes de la Trinité, de la Rédemption et de l'Incarnation: une narration se construit à partir des objets (attributs de la Passion; linceul—*perizonium*); une rhétorique de l'émotion suscite la compassion du fidèle (expression et gestes désolés de Dieu; corps douloureux du Christ mort); la méditation est nourrie par l'allégorie (gestes de Dieu qui renvoient à ceux de la Vierge). Rubens donne ainsi corps aux mystères sacrés.

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Images of the Incarnation in the Jesuit Japan Mission's Kirishitanban Story of Virgin Martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria

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From the time of the foundation of the Jesuit mission by Francis Xavier (1506–1552) in 1549, the Jesuits in Japan used books as effective tools for their missionary activities. These works prepared and published by the Jesuit Japan Press (established in 1590 and active until the order's expulsion in 1614) are usually called Kirishitanban (literally, 'Christian edition').¹ Three Kirishitanban collections of stories of the saints have survived; St. Catherine of Alexandria is the only saint whose story appears in all three. The Kirishitanban story of St. Catherine portrays her as a virgin martyr and conjoins her image with that of the Incarnate Christ.

The method of contemplation-imagination and the mystical theology of the Incarnation to be found in the Jesuit *Spiritual Exercises* influenced the making of these Kirishitanban stories of the saints. This essay thus begins by examining the role of the mental imagination in texts of the *Spiritual Exercises* and in the Kirishitanban stories. Although neither the exercises nor the stories contain illustrations, they can still be seen to make use of visual images. Second, it considers how the translators contextualized traditional hagiography in Japanese Buddhist culture. Third, it analyzes the paradoxical theology of the Incarnation that underlies the Kirishitanban representations of St. Catherine, viewing them through the lens of hagiographic gender theory. Finally, it explores how the images of St. Catherine and Christ are conjoined or, better, doubled, and argues that the identification of St. Catherine and Christ empow-

1 For the list of Kirishitanban publications, see Satow E.M., *The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan, 1591–1610* (Tokyo: 1888); and Laures J., *Kirishitan Bunko; a Manual of Books and Documents on the Early Christian Mission in Japan. With Special Reference to the Principal Libraries in Japan and More Particularly to the Collection at Sophia University, Tokyo. With an Appendix of Ancient Maps of the Far East, Especially Japan*, Monumenta Nipponica Monographs 5 (Third rev. and enl. ed., Tokyo: 1957). I use the term Kirishitanban more broadly to include unpublished manuscripts of the Jesuit Japan mission and those works circulated secretly in Japan after the Press' expulsion to Macao in 1614.

ered women readers as they anticipated martyrdom during the Japanese persecution of Christian converts.

Spiritual Exercises: Imagination on the Incarnation and the Making of Kirishitanban Hagiography

The mystery of the Incarnation of Christ is at the theological core of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus. The *Spiritual Exercises* is not a treatise but a guidebook for the spiritual director and those who go through the exercises. During the various contemplations, at the verbal prompt of the text, the exercitant internally ‘gazes’ upon a series of imagined scenes of the Incarnate Christ by ‘attending to the persons [in these scenes], their words, and their actions.’² This imaginative gaze becomes especially intense during the first day’s contemplation of the second week, “Devoted to the Incarnation”. The exercitant first sees the world as if from a bird’s-eye view with the Trinity above, and s/he then seeks to understand the meaning of God’s mission of becoming Incarnate: ‘Here it is how the Three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people: and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they decided in their eternity that the Second Person would become a human being, in order to save the human race.’³ The contemplator then visualizes the diverse human condition: ‘some white and others black, some in peace and others at war, some weeping and others laughing, some healthy and others sick, some being born and others dying, etc.’

The entire exercises take the contemplator through the scenes of the “Mysteries of the Life of Christ our Lord” deriving from the Synoptic Gospels.⁴ By ‘placing’ oneself in these settings, the contemplator imagines and feels the compassion, suffering, and joy of Christ Incarnate and emotions of other characters.⁵ Each meditation is followed by one or more colloquia, in which one engages in an imagined dialogue with a divine interlocutor, listening intently for God’s guidance. The goal of these exercises is to discover one’s ‘election’

2 St Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. G.E. Ganss, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: 1991) 402, with my insertion.

3 Ibidem 148.

4 Ibidem 183–200.

5 See De Nicolás A.T., *Ignatius de Loyola, Power of Imaging: A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining through the Collected Works of Ignatius de Loyola, with a Translation of These Works* (Albany, NY: 1986) xxi–xxii.

or life direction, to be discerned in and through transformative moments of encounter with the divine mystery of the Incarnation.⁶ These exercises also serve to heighten the spirituality of mission as the exercitant contemplates the Trinity's self-sending into the human realm by means of the Incarnation, Christ's self-giving in the Passion, and his sending forth his disciples to the farthest limits of the world. The exercitant also absorbs the Eucharistic mission of Christ through sacrifice of one's life for the spiritual nourishment of one's fellow women and men. This missionary and Eucharistic spirituality moves the exercitant actively to serve Christ by traveling withersoever in the world one's services are required.⁷

John O'Malley points out that the *Spiritual Exercises* provided the encompassing basis for the multifaceted ministries of the early Jesuits.⁸ The Jesuits who elected to become 'apostles' to Japan continued to cultivate these imaginative spiritual exercises for their members and new converts, as they developed their new ministries. They created a new genre of image-based interactive texts, the Kirishitanban stories of the saints. As Hippolyte Delehaye has shown, hagiographers interweave historical facts, traditional legends and popular cultural imagination about the saints to craft local variants of their stories for particular communities of readers.⁹ Translator-editors of Kirishitanban stories of the saints also devised variants for the Japanese imagination. Like the *Spiritual Exercises*, these Kirishitanban stories call forth detailed, evocative scenes of the saints' bodily and emotive experiences, as well as visualizing various characters with whom they interacted; they prompt their Japanese audience imaginatively to visualize events from the saints' lives, and encourage active participation in the Eucharistic spirituality propagated by the Jesuits.¹⁰

6 Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises* 161–166.

7 A similar process of spiritual transformation is found in what Walter Melion describes as 'reformation' and 'conversion' toward the 'apostolic vocation', through meditation on the text-image in Jerome Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes*. See Melion W.S., "Sacred History and Sacred Emblem on the Sea of Tiberias: Jerome Nadal on the Penultimate Apparition of the Risen Christ", in François W. – Den Hollander, A.A. (eds.), *Infant Milk or Hardy Nourishment? The Bible for Lay People and Theologians in the Early Modern Period* (Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA: 2009) 369–85.

8 O'Malley J.W., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass: 1993) 85.

9 Delehaye H., *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V.M. Crawford (Reprint ed., Folcroft, PA: 1977).

10 Ditchfield makes a similar connection between meditation on "concrete details of the Passion" in the *Spiritual Exercises* and the vitae of the female saints composed by the Counter-Reformation hagiographer Pietro Maria Campi. See Ditchfield S., *Liturgy, Sanctity, and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the*

Kirishitanban Contextualized Translations

From the early phase of the Japanese mission, a team of missionaries, Japanese catechists, and Christian women and men translated many stories into Japanese in the style of medieval Buddhist minstrel *setsuwa* (ballads).¹¹ The *biwa*-strumming Jesuit Brother Lourenço and others told these stories to the accompaniment of traditional tunes, and they also encouraged audience participation.¹² The translators solicited feedback from their auditors, improving their manuscripts accordingly. They generally replaced European cultural symbols with more familiar Japanese ones.¹³ They utilized numerous Buddhist words to designate Christian concepts. While rendering untranslatable ideas in transliterated Portuguese, Spanish and Latin, they yet attempted to Japanize them by adding honorifics expressive of differential reverence and hierarchical relationships. For example, by adding the honorific *go* to the Portuguese *Passiom*, Christ's Passion becomes the proper noun *go Passiom*. They also created Japanese neologisms: *gotaixet* (honorific *go* and the word meaning 'precious') expresses the precious love of God.

Due to the vocal nature of the literature, the Jesuit Japan Press first used the typeset known as *rōmaji*, or Romanization, to render Japanese phonetics into letters. Later it adopted *kanamajiri*, consisting of Japanese characters (also phonetic) and limited numbers of Chinese characters. It avoided *kanbun*, which consists only of Chinese letters and was used exclusively by male scholars of the Chinese classics. Thus the Press intended Kirishitanban books to be read by ordinary persons, including women. The Jesuit records show the popularity of the stories of female saints, especially among women

Particular, Cambridge Studies in Italian History and Culture (Cambridge – New York: 1995) 190.

- 11 See Obara S. (ed.), *Sanctos no gosagyō*, Kirishitan kenkyū 33 (Tokyo: 1996) 383–411; also Ward H.N., *Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1549–1650*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Farnham, Eng. – Burlington, VT: 2009) 40–41; and eadem., "Women and Kirishitanban Literature: Translation, Gender and Theology in Early Modern Japan," *Early Modern Women: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 7 (2012) 271–81.
- 12 See Shirane H. (ed.), *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, trans. Sonja Arntzen et al., Translations from the Asian Classics (New York: 2007) 1159–60; and Ruiz-de-Medina J.G., *Iezusu kaishi to Kirishitan fukyō* (Tokyo: 2003) 131–68.
- 13 See Farge W.J., *The Japanese Translations of the Jesuit Mission Press, 1590–1614: De Imitatione Christi and Guía de Pecadores*, Studies in the History of Missions 22 (Lewiston, NY: 2002).

readers.¹⁴ St. Catherine became the most popular, appearing in all three collections of saints' stories.¹⁵

The first collection of stories of the saints, entitled *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* (*Excerpts from the Acts of the Saints*), was published in *rōmaji* in 1591.¹⁶ St. Catherine's chapter (designated as text A in the following) is entitled "On the Martyrdom of the Glorious Virgin Saint Catherine, which appears in the record of a person called Simeon Metaphrastes. November 25".¹⁷ The last page clearly states that the Japanese Jesuit brother Irmão [Tōin] Vicente was the chief-translator-editor and redactor-hagiographer of this story.¹⁸ However, Vicente and other translators probably did not read Metaphrastes' tenth-century Greek, and more likely used a source text that was close to the Latin translation of Metaphrastes by Laurentius Surius (1522–78).¹⁹

- 14 Such women as Hibiya Monica (c. 1549–c. 1577), Blessed Takeda Inês (m. 1603), Ōta Julia (d. after 1621), Luzia de la Cruz (c. 1580–1656), owned and read Kirishitanban stories of the saints. See Ward, *Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1549–1650*.
- 15 Nearly all of the original visual illustrations for individual saints in the Kirishitanban collections have been torn off from the pages and lost. Two heavily damaged pictorial images attributed to St. Catherine, which may or may not have been attached to the books, survive.
- 16 Two copies of *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* (Kazusa, Jesuit College: 1591), in two volumes, are preserved in Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Italy and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The facsimile of the edition from the Marciana Library appears in Koso T. (ed.), *Sanctos no gosagveo go vchi nvqigaqi*, Kirishitanban seisen (Tokyo: 2006).
- 17 In Japanese, it reads: *Gloriosa Virgem Sancta Catherina no Martyrio no Yodai. Core Simeon Metaphrastes to yv fito no qirocnyi miyetari. Novemb. 25*. It is found in *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi*, II 61–85. Metaphrastes' *Passio* of St. Catherine is considered to be the earliest extant text (960s), and it became the basis of most Latin translations. On the earliest manuscript tradition of the *passio* of St. Catherine and its transmission from the early to high Middle Ages, see Walsh C., *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*, Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Aldershot, Eng. – Burlington, VT: 2007).
- 18 Irmão Vicente Tōin (1540–1609), also called Hōin or Vicente Vilela, and his father Irmão Yōhō Paulo (1508–95) of Wakasa, were medical doctors, and served as Jesuit preachers, teachers of Japanese language and religion, and major translators of Kirishitanban literature. Vicente translated all but four chapters in *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi*. See Schütte, J.F. (ed. – anot.), *Monumenta Historica Japoniae I: Textus Catalogorum Japoniae aliaque de Personis Domibusque S.J. in Japonia, Informationes et Relationes, 1549–1654*, Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu III (Rome: 1975) 1325.
- 19 See Migne, J.P. (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca* 116 (Paris, 1864), cols. 275–302. The text A adds Catherine's father's name not found in Metaphrastes / Surius. This may suggest that the Kirishitanban translators used another Latin version.

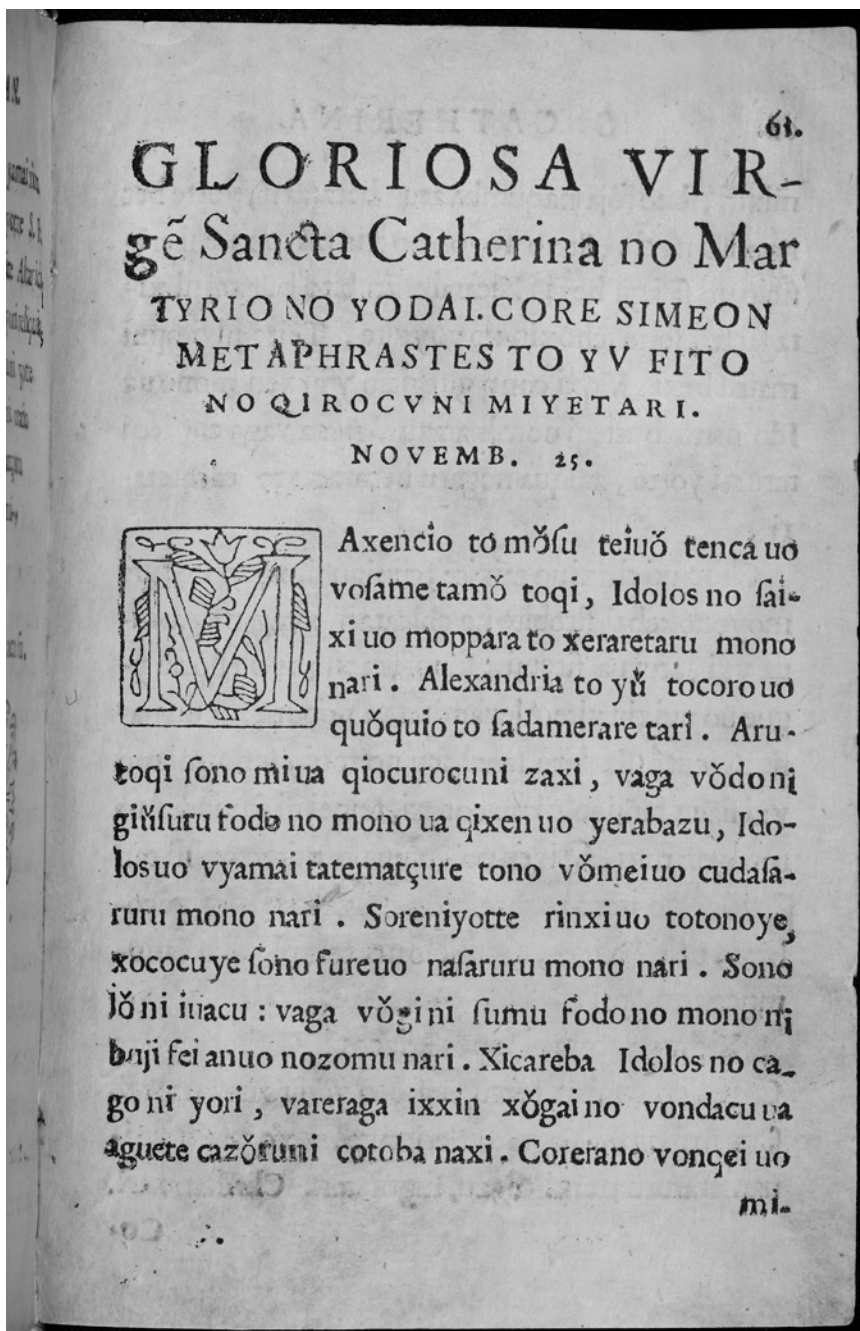


FIGURE 18.1 Chapter-Heading, "Gloriosa Virgem Sancta Catherina no Martyrio no Yodai. Core Simeon Metaphrastes to yv fito no qirocvni miyetari. Novemb. 25", in Sanctos no gosagevo no vchi nvqigaqi (Cazzusa, Jesuit College: 1591). The Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, Shelfmark: Arch. B.f.69, v.2, p. 61.

The second text of St. Catherine's story, entitled *Vida de Sancta Chaterina Virgen e Martyr* (indicated as text B), is found in another collection of stories of the saints in manuscript, usually called the Barreto Copy, dating from about the same period (1590–91). This collection bears the Portuguese title *Vidas gloriosas de algũs Sanctos e Sanctas* (*The Glorious Lives of Some Male and Female Saints*) but its contents are all in Japanese *rōmaji*.²⁰ Text B does not identify the original source or translator's name; however, with numerous differences in word choices, it is very close to text A.²¹

The third story of St. Catherine, entitled ヒル前サンタカテレイナノ御作業 (*Acts of Virgin Saint Catherine*) (designated as text C), is found in *Martyrio no cagami* (*Mirror of Martyrdom*). This collection in *kanamajiri* consists of only three virgin martyr saints: Anastasia, Catherine and Marina. It is considered to have originated after 1614 during the fiercest phase of persecution. The government confiscated it with other papers, which had circulated among underground communities for about 175 years.²² Compared to A and B, the style of C is more colloquial, and it translates many transliterated loanwords in A and B into Japanese.

Kirishitanban St. Catherine's story can be situated in a lineage of localized and expanded medieval European translations of the ancient Greco-Roman prototype. St. Catherine was one of the most popular saints in medieval Europe. Numerous translations in various vernacular languages of her story appealed to the imaginations of the readers in the Rhineland, Normandy, England, Wales, France, Germany, Sweden, Czech, Russia, and Spain.²³ The

20 "Vida de Sancta Chaterina Virgem e Martyr," *Vidas gloriosas de algũs Sanctos e Sanctas*, is found in *Codices Regenses Latini* 459, Vatican Apostolic Library, fols. 276–89. The Codex is called the Barreto copy after its amanuensis Emmanuel Barreto.

21 See the textual comparisons of A and B in Fukushima K., *Kirishitan shiryō to Kokugo kenkyū*, Kasama Sōsho 38 (Tokyo: 1973) 121–52. Fukushima suggests that text B predates the more refined text A.

22 The confiscated original of 1789 is missing. Copies made in 1896 are preserved in Kirishitan Bunko Library, Sophia University in Tokyo. See Anesaki M., *Kirishitan shūmon no hakugai to senpuku* (Tokyo 1930) 131–239. A critical edition of text C (ヒル前サンタカテレイナノ御作業) is available in Obara S. (ed.), *Kirishitan no junkyō to senpuku*, Kirishitan kenkyū 43 (Tokyo: 2006) 110–27.

23 For bibliographies on the numerous medieval cults of St. Catherine, see Jenkins J. – Lewis K.J. (eds.), *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, Medieval Women 8 (Turnhout, Belgium: 2003); and Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria*. Also see Sands T.R., *The Company She Keeps: The Medieval Swedish Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria and Its Transformations*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 362 (Tempe, Ariz. – Turnhout, Belgium: 2010).

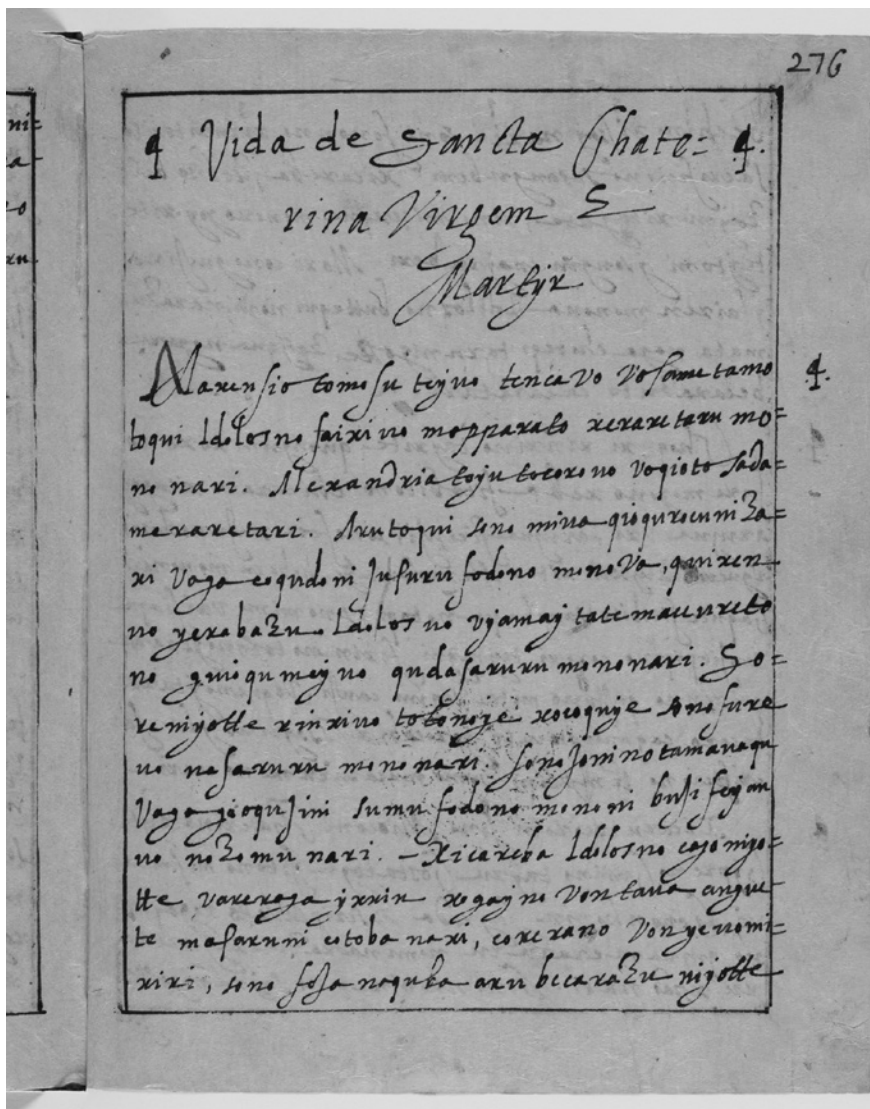


FIGURE 18.2 Chapter-Heading, "Vida de Sancta Chaterina Virgem e Martyr", in *Vidas gloriosas de algũs Sanctos e Sanctas*. Vatican Apostolic Library, Regimenses Latini 459, fol. 276.

thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine added posthumous miracles and described the translation of her relics from Mt. Sinai to Rouen.²⁴ Late medieval versions added extra legends, including episodes of her conversion to Christianity at the urging of St. Mary, her baptism, and her mystical betrothal to Christ, and also provided an extended genealogy, as well as claiming her connections to the local nobility. Following the humanist Surius' sixteenth-century critical edition, the Kirishitanban St. Catherine retains the narrative line, excises some of the medieval European embellishment, and skillfully assumes a Japanese identity.

St. Catherine's story is presented in several dramatic scenes. Catherine is described as the very learned daughter of a Roman official in Alexandria. Kirishitanban texts depict her more as a mature woman (*nhonin*) than as the young beauty of Surius and the European tradition. She is knowledgeable not only of sacred scripture, Greek philosophy and Christian teachings, but also of Buddhist teachings. In the opening scene, she challenges Emperor Maxentius who mandates pagan worship in his realm. In the second scene, she wins a debate with fifty imperial scholars, who all become Christians and are subsequently executed. In the third scene, the emperor imprisons her without food, but she receives divine communion directly from Christ. In the series of scenes of brutal torture which the emperor imposes upon Catherine, including the famous torture of the four wheels, Catherine remains indestructible and steadfast due to divine intervention. She helps convert the empress and her retainer Porphirio, whose martyrdoms appear as corollary scenes. In the final scene, before execution, Catherine recites a long prayer. This prayer in the Kirishitanban version differs from that in Surius, which has Catherine state her objections to the distribution of her body parts as relics; instead, Kirishitanban Catherine asks that her body be preserved intact until the Day of Judgment. When Catherine is beheaded, white blood flows from her virgin body, and angels transport her body to Mt. Sinai, site of her eventual shrine and cult.

Virgin Martyr Saints as Representations of Christ Incarnate Crucified and Risen

In many of these scenes, Kirishitanban Catherine acts and speaks as if she were Christ. Gender theories in recent studies of virgin martyr saints are helpful in analyzing these images in which the saint stands as proxy for Christ

24 Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. W.G. Ryan, 2 vols. (Third reprint ed., Princeton: 2012) II 339.

Incarnate. Noting the prevalent motifs in late medieval stories of virgin martyr saints, Karen Winstead summarizes well the paradoxical theology of the Incarnation that these stories of virgin martyrs convey:²⁵

As the most vulnerable and carnal of human beings—women—the virgin martyrs testify that the flesh can indeed triumph over corporeal desires, that weakness can prevail over strength. As women who transcended their gender to become manly, the virgin martyrs evoke the mystery of a God made man. Their bodies, torn and made whole, replicate the miracle of the Eucharist. The paradox of the virgins' triumph is distilled in their emblems, where instruments of torture designed to erase identity are used to proclaim identity.

This theology of the Incarnation, God=Human=Body=Women, is based on the biblical notion of God's election of the weak to manifest God's supernatural power. The Gospel accounts of Christ crucified represent the vulnerability of God-in-flesh, who was criminalized, stripped of his garments, dispossessed of his dignity, despised, derided, tortured and died a cruel and violent death. Yet in three days Christ rises to eternal life. In this divine mystery, the weak becomes mighty and the humble becomes exalted. This paradoxical good news, that the weakest in human society can be transformed into the strongest, thus to manifest God's power, appears repeatedly in other biblical passages such as 1 Cor. 1:27, 2 Cor. 12:10, Philippians 2:5–11, and the *Magnificat* of St Mary Mother of Jesus in Luke 1:46–51. With reference to the Gospel accounts and Pauline epistle (1 Cor. 1:23–29), the early Church continued to memorialize and celebrate this mystery in the ritual performance of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, symbols of Christ's body and blood, were revered as the life-giving sustenance for the Church, which itself is also understood to be the mystical body of Christ in this present world.

Hagiographic tradition also underscores the continuity of the death and resurrection of Christ in the martyrdom of virgin saints.²⁶ As Christ became bodily incarnate and lived as God-Human within a contingent social world at

25 Winstead K.A., *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: 1997) 12.

26 For some examples in the hagiographic tradition of women saints' self-identification with Christ the *Imago Dei* and proclamation of the Word, their defiance against unjust structures of power and innocent suffering for the sake of others, see Holloway J.B. – Wright C.S. – Bechtold J. (eds.), *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: 1990) 217–8.

a particular historical time and place, so too, virgin martyrs were seen bodily to respond to historical contingencies of time and place. In this tradition, virgin martyrs' broken bodies and spent blood were understood eucharistically. When actual martyrdom was not available, women mystics sometimes underwent an ascetic imitation of martyrdom: even as they gave all their corporeal food to the hungry, they hungered intensely for the spiritual food to be consumed in the Holy Eucharist. As Carolyn W. Bynum's examination of late medieval women's texts demonstrates, 'To eat God was to take into one's self the suffering flesh and cross. To eat God was *imitatio crucis*'.²⁷ As Christ Incarnate took up the burden of human flesh, and 'in dying fed the world', women, who represented fleshly humanity, identified with the physical being of Christ, wholly dedicating themselves to and, in some cases, giving up their lives for their Savior.²⁸ In such an understanding, through the imitation of Christ who is crucified in the Eucharist, the humanity of female mystics and martyrs is subsumed into his humanity to such an extent that his suffering becomes theirs. In this mystical union, female mystics and martyrs, in their perceivably weak flesh, became substantially fused with God Incarnate, with whom they were co-crucified. He and they are conjoined, living as one.

The assumption that women are inherently weak derives from patriarchal ideology and was codified in the European tradition. This notion was easily bequeathed to late medieval Japanese society, which also had its own misogynist tradition of women as inherently weak. In the hagiographic tradition, saintly women, through faith and mystical union with Christ Incarnate, overcome this gender disadvantage: becoming exemplars of courageous, outspoken, daring, public, and manly behavior, they resist the forces that insist upon their subservience to the paterfamilias. The story of the Virgin Martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria manifests this paradoxical theology of the Incarnation and inversion of gender norms. Her superb oratorical power encouraged laywomen preachers to imitate Catherine in various historical contexts.²⁹ In Winstead's study of the late medieval Catherine cycles in England, St. Catherine as an 'audacious and eloquent teacher' epitomizes the 'saint deriding tradition and quoting Scripture like the stereotypical Lollard wife'.³⁰ The Kirishitanban

27 Bynum C.W., *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics (Berkeley: 1987) 67.

28 Ibidem 270, also 178. Medieval symbols represented the female gender as 'soft, unwise, poor, and human', as opposed to male strength, intelligence and spiritual power (279).

29 See Jenkins – Lewis, *St Katherine of Alexandria* 3 and 133.

30 Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs* 17.

St. Catherine is also a strong preacher with superior intellectual abilities, who exercises her skills as public orator and community leader, and emphasizes her autonomy in choosing a priestly vocation. Quoting Scripture and propagating Catholic doctrine, Catherine derides the villainous emperor, sometimes mockingly dubbed a demon *tengu*, who issues the mandate of state Buddhism. The Kirishitanban readers would have noticed the similarity between St. Catherine and the audacious and eloquent preacher Naitō Julia and her society of women catechists, who worked under the auspices of the Jesuit Japan mission.³¹

Doubling Images of Kirishitanban Virgin Martyr St. Catherine and Christ Incarnate

Vivid images punctuate each scene of the Kirishitanban story of St. Catherine. These images of Christ's *go Passiom* and St. Catherine's passion intersect and double.

In the opening scenes, Catherine confronts the emperor who is offering temple sacrifices to the Buddha (*Fotoqe*); the reader is encouraged to see St. Catherine as an exemplary teacher of the faith (*dōxi*) who labors to imitate labors of Jesus the Rabbi.³² She declares to the emperor: 'I studied various learned schools, but abandoned everything to become a maidservant of the immeasurable Jesus Christ. As the prophet prophesied, "dismantling the knowledge of the learned, and doing away with the wisdom of the wise"', alluding to Isaiah 29:14.³³ She pays homage to the mystery of the Incarnation, as she sums up the essential teachings of Christianity: 'Know the immeasurable Deus: For, Deus who does not die received the human body for our sakes; in order to

31 See Ward H.N., "Jesuits, Too: Jesuits, Women Catechists, and Jezebels in Christian-Century Japan", in O'Malley J.W. et al. (eds.), *The Jesuits II, Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: 2006).

32 Kirishitanban texts use Buddha (*Fotoqe*), Buddha-gods (*Butjin*), idols (*idolos*) and Mercury (*Mercurio*) to designate the imperial cult.

33 *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* 2:65: 'Xōgacu uo qiuamuredomo, cotogotocu uo sute, facari maximasanu Iesu Christo no go guegio to naru mono nari. Propheta uo motte notamō gotoqu, chixano gacumon uo foroboxi, qenxa no chiye uo sutetarito.' I am providing a literal translation of the scriptural verse (Isaiah 29:14) as it appears in the Kirishitanban. NRSV has 'The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden.'

save us from dying, Deus chose death. Therefore there is no doubt that Deus will help those who lay aside their hesitation and look to Deus's mercy'.³⁴

Seeing that the emperor desires her carnally, having been struck by her beauty, Catherine admonishes him not to adore that which is created from dust and returns to dust, but to worship only the honorable Creator (*go sacuxa*). Addressing her as a mere woman (*vonna*), the emperor replies, 'I have no desire to argue with such woman as junior as you. I shall gather together scholars to lecture you on the superiority of the idols'.³⁵ The emperor summons fifty imperial scholars and orders them to 'shut up the mouth' of Catherine, but he then cautions them that she is 'a very wise woman but criticizes Mercury, the source of all wisdom'.³⁶ He also warns them, 'Do not make light of the disputant simply because she is a woman. Be well informed that she is strong'. They assure the emperor that she may be very learned, but, being a woman, lacks the eloquence of an expert rhetorician.

At the public disputation (*mondō*), Catherine preaches a long sermon on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, whom she acknowledges as true God and true man. Her sermon follows an order reminiscent of the "Mysteries of the Life of Christ Our Lord" in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, extending from the Creation, Fall, Incarnation, *go Passiom*, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension of Christ, to the apostles' mission. Then she exhorts her audience to examine one's life, follow the logic of her teaching (*dōri*) and worship only Deus, serving Christ.³⁷ Unlike the Pharisees in the Gospel stories, who remained skeptical toward Jesus, these imperial scholars, having been converted by Catherine's powers of persuasion, return to the emperor and declare, 'There is no logical teaching that can counter this woman's oratory'.³⁸ The emperor orders all fifty scholars to be burnt in the middle of the city of Kyoto. The scholars prostrate before the saint, asking her to forgive their sins and begging her to baptize them. Catherine joyfully addresses her new disciples:³⁹

34 Ibid. 2:64–5: 'macoto no facari maximasanu Deus uo mixiritamaye. Sonoyuye ua: xixi tatamauanu Deus varerauo tasuqe tamauan tameni, ningai uo vqe saxerare, varera no xisuru yori nogaxi tamuan tameni, xi vo yerabi tori tamayeba, mayoitaru monodomo sono mayoiuo sute, cono vonjifi uo auogui tatematçuraba, tasuqe tamō beqi coto vtagai naxi'.

35 Ibid. 2:67: 'vare nangi gotoqi no jacufai naru vonna to arasō beqini arazu. Mazzu gacuxa uo atçumete idolos no curai uo nangi ni qicasu bexi'.

36 Ibid. 2:67. In the following discourse, while A and B continue to call Catherine *vonna*, C names her 'a *vonna* called Catherina'.

37 See *ibid.* 2:70–73.

38 Ibid. 2:73: 'cono nhonin no yenzet ni teqirōbeqi dōri naxi'. C has 'wisdom' for 'speech'.

39 Ibid. 2:74: 'macotoni vonovono ua quafō naru fitobito nari. Yami uo sute, macoto no ficari uo xitai, xisu beqi coto uo vaseure, facarinacu xixi tamō to yū ctonaқи Deus ni tachi cayeri

Truly every one of you is blessed, for you left the darkness. Seeking the true light, and not fearing death, you return to Deus who never dies. The fire with which the evil man burns each of you is your baptism. It is a bridge that takes you straight up to heaven. It cleanses all your impurity, and guides you to the throne of heaven shining like the stars.

The scholars receive the crown of *martyrio* in the baptism of blood, and their bodies remain miraculously unburnt.⁴⁰ This image of St. Catherine as priest, divinely sanctioned to grant the sacraments of absolution and baptism, implicitly analogizes her to Jesus, who received his priestly authority from God.

Again and again, the translator-hagiographers remind the readers that Catherine is a Japanese virgin. After the execution of the scholars, the emperor tries to seduce Catherine, urging her to become his consort. Catherine refuses, saying she is the spouse (*von tçuma*) of Jesus Christ, and as such, is adorned with chastity (*castidade*; C has *fubon*). Readers would have been aware that Kirishitan women who took a vow of chastity posed a great threat to their local communities, within which they were regarded almost exclusively as procreators of male heirs; they were also subject to rulers who exercised the right to force any woman to become their wife or concubine. To the emperor who tries to intimidate her, Catherine replies by echoing Jesus' words to Judas, whereby she prophesies her imminent death: 'Do what you wish. For you persecute me so that I may gain eternal glory. Because of me, there will be many among your retainers who will become Christians and believe in Jesus Christ. There will be many who will join me in going to the high court of glory'.⁴¹

Infuriated, the emperor has her stripped and then beaten for four hours, until her whole body is awash with blood. From this point on, Catherine's road to martyrdom parallels the *go Passiom* as summarized in the contemplations for the third week of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In typical hagiographic fashion, Catherine's bodily suffering is greatly accentuated.

tamayeba nari. Acuninra vonovono uo yaqu beqi fi ua sunauachi vonovono no Baptismo nari, vonovono uo agueraren faxitaru bexi. Vonovono no fujõ uo qiyome, cacayaqu foxi no gotoqu tenno von aruji no von maye ye michibiqu bexi'.

40 The dates of this and the other two martyrdoms differ: in text A) November 19 and November 25; B) November 18 and December 25; and C) November 12 and no dates.

41 Ibid. 2:76: 'voboximesu mamani facarai tamaye: sono yuye ua vare uo xemetamõ niuoit-eua, sono cauarini itçu made mo fate naqi gloria uo vbexi. Mata go xinca no vchi yorimo, vare yuyeni amata Christan to nari, Iesu Christo uo xinji tatematçuri, vare to tomo ni gloria no tacaqi dairi ni mairumono vouocar u bexi'.

Catherine's mystical experience of the Eucharist in prison, where she is deprived of food for twelve days, is implicitly analogized to the Last Supper. Deus, her true parent (*von voya*), sends a dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, source of the heavenly food that sustains her. The choice of the term *von voya* for parent implies that this parent is not a father, but rather, a nurturing mother. The food furnished through the Spirit is none other than the *Virgem's* spouse (*von tçuma*) Jesus Christ, who is compared to a manna-like sweet dew (*canro*). The *canro*, divine mother's sweet milk, is the blood of *go Passiom*, the divine essence flowing into Catherine's body, that sustains her throughout her ordeal. As Bynum's study illustrates, these maternal and nurturing images of God and Christ in the Eucharist prominently appeared in the texts of medieval mystics, especially those of St. Catherine of Siena (1347–80), who herself strove to emulate St. Catherine of Alexandria.⁴² Medieval physiological theory, which equated breast milk and blood as life-sustaining, underlies this imagery of restorative bodily fluids.⁴³ The liquid (blood / milk) flowing from the breasts (wounded side) of Christ tastes sweet and inebriates the drinker.⁴⁴ But it is also bitter because of it accompanies the pain and agony of execution. Drinking from the breasts of Christ crucified, women are incorporated into 'God's body', and initiated into Christ's mission of saving the world.⁴⁵ The Eucharistic imagery climaxes at the beheading of St. Catherine, when white blood streams from her veins. This miracle signals that she has become a myroblyte, a healing saint.

Christ appears to Catherine in prison with a multitude of angels and addresses her, his words echoing those of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Annunciate: 'Do not be afraid, my daughter, because I am with you and your suffering will not overwhelm you. Be the true teacher (*dõxi*) of many people, and you will receive a great reward from me according to your patience'.⁴⁶ The parallel between Christ and Catherine as teachers of the faith, imbues this exhortation, in which Christ endorses Catherine as true *dõxi*, a traditional

42 See Bynum, *Holy Feast* 166, on their visions of Christ as nursing mother. Also see 172–80 and 278 on metaphors of St. Catherine of Siena.

43 Bynum, *Holy Feast* 122, 179, 270.

44 Bynum, *Holy Feast* 116 and 249 (Alice of Schaerbeke); 118 (Lutgard); and 178.

45 Bynum, *Holy Feast* 274; also 119, 218, 275. On suckling at the wounds of Christ and women's aspiration for martyrdom, see 142. In Julian of Norwich's theology, the cross also symbolizes the birth-pangs of God the Mother (266–67).

46 *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* 2:80: 'icani vaga musume, vare nangi to tomoni ireba, vosorezare, curuximi ua nangi ni ataru becarazu. Tada amata no fito no macoto no *dõxi* to nari, nangi no cannin uo motte vare yori võqi naru fepõ uo vbexi'. Emphasis added. The text C does not contain the word *dõxi* but instead says, 'Guide many to the true path' ('tada amata no fito uo macoto no michi ni fiquireraru bexi').

Buddhist term for a master teacher, guide or spiritual director. In other Kirishitanban literature, the term is applied to Christ.

In prison, Catherine receives another secret visit from the empress, along with her retainer Prophirio and his soldiers, all of whom become the saint's disciples. Astonished by Catherine's glorious countenance, the empress prostrates herself before her and avers that she 'lacked the freedom' to come and visit her earlier, 'because she was a woman'.⁴⁷ Catherine predicts the empress's martyrdom. When the empress admits that she fears the wrath of her husband, Catherine encourages her to endure the momentary suffering of her body (*xixixin*), in exchange for which she will receive eternal comfort. In response to Prophirio, who enthusiastically asks what the rewards (*goxōquan*) of serving Jesus Christ would be, Catherine answers by invoking the scriptural promise that God prepares numerous blessings (*xotocu*, C has *tocugi*) for those who serve the Lord with love (*gotaixet*).

Whereas the *Spiritual Exercises* embeds the scourging of Christ within the whole of his Passion, the Kirishitanban life of St. Catherine focuses on two graphic scenes of torture. The emperor summons Catherine from prison, telling her that he 'does not wish to harm her beautiful body', and tempting her with the promise that if she worships his Buddha, 'he shall make her his consort'.⁴⁸ In answer, Catherine reminds him once again that human flesh is merely temporal, its beauty fleeting. The emperor then subjects Catherine to the infamous torture of the spiked wheels. Her body is pulled taut and her arms and legs tied to four wheels (*yotçuno xarin*) equipped with various blades designed to cut her to pieces as the wheels turn. However, angels descend from heaven and cut the ropes securing the wheels, so that they come loose and strike the torturers. In the Japanese context, this broken wheel metaphor fits perfectly into the Kirishitan anti-Buddhist message of the broken wheel of karma.

Wanting to stop the emperor from torturing Catherine further, the empress argues that it is foolish to become an enemy of Deus.⁴⁹ The outraged emperor now orders the empress to be placed in a large jar, her breasts to be fastened to its rim and mangled by the jar's lid. Then, having extricated her, they drag the empress by her mutilated breasts to a place of execution outside the city, where she is beheaded.⁵⁰ Passing by the imprisoned St. Catherine, the empress asks for a prayer, and Catherine assures her that she will be glorified in heaven.

47 Ibid. 2:78: 'cocoro ni macaxenu vonna no mi'.

48 Ibid. 2:80: 'sono mi no birei uo sonzasu coto nacare'.

49 Ibid. 2:82.

50 Ibid. 2:83. The texts get confused in this emotionally disturbing scene. In A and C, the empress' whole chest is torn open between her two breasts; in B the soldiers cut off her

This brief exchange shows the strong bond between two women, who in normal circumstances would have been rivals for the queen's position. The sexual degradation of the empress and, more specifically, the mutilation of her breasts, wellsprings of a mother's nourishing milk, that here become fountain-heads of a martyr's spiritually nutritive blood, serves to remind readers of the Eucharist, symbol of the torn body of Christ crucified, whose blood is the life-giving source of nourishment to faithful Christians. Inspired by the steadfast faith of Catherine and the empress, Porphirio announces to the emperor that he, like many soldiers in the imperial army, has joined the army (*tçuvamono*) of Jesus Christ. The emperor executes them all.

The image of the procession of Catherine to the execution site functions as an analogy to Christ's *via crucis*. Seeing that he cannot weaken Catherine's resolve, either by courtesy (*teinei*) or threats (*vodoxi*), the emperor orders that she be beheaded. Countless noble ladies-in-waiting (*nhôbôxû*) follow Catherine, weeping and lamenting her fate.⁵¹ The imagery of women tracing the footsteps of Catherine ties this group of Japanese *nhôbôxû* to the women who followed Christ on the *via dolorosa*, as described in the Gospels. Kirishitan women readers must have imagined themselves walking alongside Catherine as she processed to martyrdom. During this period, the Confucian restriction against the free association of women was rapidly tightening in Japan. Imagining this community of women centered on Catherine may have freed female readers both actually and imaginatively, encouraging them to congregate into networks of fellow believers across class lines.

The final prayer of Catherine makes the Incarnation motif of the story clear. Just as Christ prayed from the cross, Catherine, as she is martyred, looks heavenward and prays. This prayer constitutes her final sermon as *dôxi*. She takes a Buddhist ritual *gaxxô* pose, even while arguing against imperial Buddhism:⁵²

breasts piece by piece and then behead her. When precisely the empress meets Catherine is left unclear in all three versions.

51 Ibid. 2:84. Text A has 'famous ladies at the court' (*reqireqi no nhôbôxû*); B) 'high ranking noble ladies at the court' (*côqe no nhôbôxû*); and C) 'famous womenfolk' (*reqireqi no nhonintachi*).

52 Ibid. 2:84–5. 'Icani vareraga Deus nite maximasu Iesu Christo vaga axi uo suuaritaru ixi no vye ni voqi tamai, vaga michi no go annaixa nite maximasu ni yotte, vonrei uo môxi aguru nari. Tadaimamo vare ni taixite, Cruz no vye nite nobetamô mite uo nobesaxerare, von mi to Fides ni taixite sasague tatematçuru animauo vqe tori tamaye, icani von aruji vareraga cotnicu narucoto uo voboximexi idaxi tamaye, vaga guchi yuye ni tçucamatçuritaru ayamari uo luizo no toqi, araqenaqi teqi no maye ni arauarenu yô ni facarai tamaye, tada vôn mini taixite, nagasu chi nite vocaxitaru toga uo arai tamaye, von mi ni taixi tatematçurite vquru qizu ni yotte, sono nozomi uo motçu fito yori mirarenu yôni facarai tamaye.'

I give thanks to you Jesus Christ, our Deus, for you place my feet securely upon a rock and you guide my path. Stretch out the hand that you extended on the cross, to receive my soul dedicated to you and to the faith. Lord, remember that I am but *cotnicu* (bone-flesh), and at the time of the Last Judgment, do not expose my mistakes, made in ignorance, to my brutal enemies. Wash my sins with the blood that I shed for you. Hide me from those who intend to harm me, for the sake of the wounds that I receive on your behalf. Give light to the persons who surround me, so that they might see you. I ask you not to make vain the prayers of those who worship your precious name on my account. I entrust these things to your precious throne.

As Christ shed his blood for sinful humankind, in obedience to God, so Catherine, the image of Christ crucified, acknowledges that her blood is shed for God and for the sake of everyone around her.

Having finished her prayer, Catherine turns to the executioner and tells him to do what he must, as ordered by the emperor, again echoing Jesus' words to Judas. The white blood that flows like milk from Catherine's mortal wound, not only recalls the blood shed from the side wound of Christ, but also evokes, in its milky whiteness, the notion that Catherine is like Mother Christ, who feeds his followers sacramentally in the Eucharist, uniting them to himself. The story ends with a final miracle: angels carry Catherine's body to Mount Sinai to be buried.⁵³ Just before the chief translator of Japanese text A signs off, saying, 'Irmão Vicente translated this', he describes the angelic transportation of her body: 'By the hand of angels, [God] stored the precious corpse (*von xigai*) in a mountain called Sinai'.⁵⁴ The textual image of St. Catherine's body being carried away, perhaps still dripping white blood, furnished an immaterial relic to the imagination of Kirishitan community.

Mata cono mauari ni yru fitobito ni von mi uo mixiri tatematçuru ficari uo ataye tamaye, mata vare uo motte tattoqi mina uo tattomi tatematçuru beqi mono no Oratio uo munax-iq naxitamauazare to tanomi tatematçuru. Core mina von curai ni taixi tatematçurite, nozomi tatematçuru'.

53 The texts B and C add: 'They say that her coffin is still there', in the typical ballad style.

54 *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* 2:85: 'von xigai uoba Anjo no te yori Sinaito yū yama ni vosame tamō mono nari. q Irm.Vicente core uo fonyacu su'.

The Kirishitan Community as Virgin Martyr Saint Catherine and Her Disciples

In reflecting the Eucharistic and missionary spirituality of the Jesuits, the Kirishitanban story of St. Catherine exercises the imaginative faculty of the votary, encouraging her to explore the analogy between the virgin martyr and Christ Incarnate as teacher, guide, preacher, priest, spouse, martyr and Eucharistic presence. Catherine is thereby seen to transcend her gender.

The Kirishitanban story of St. Catherine expresses the hagiographic ideals upheld by the persecuted Kirishitan community. The virgin martyr St. Catherine became the living symbol of the suffering community, bodying forth the paradoxical theology of the Incarnation, in which the weakest becomes the strongest. In practicing the *Spiritual Exercises* and reading stories of the saints, the Kirishitans imagined an alternative human society, saved, ordered, and beheld by Christ, according to the way of *gotaixet* love. These ideals empowered the community to preach, teach and work toward liberation from the strictures of a highly stratified society, within which they were bound by religious, legal, social and familial obligations. The emperor of Catherine's story functioned as a composite image of brutal dictators such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Ieyasu, Hidetada and Iemitsu, who criminalized and executed Kirishitans. Many leaders of the community actually imitated St. Catherine in representing Christ Incarnate to their fellow Japanese, embracing the *go Passiom* and suffering a martyr's death.

Between 1600 and 1650, the incarnational theology of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the Kirishitanban martyrology epitomized in the life and death of St. Catherine, guided tens of thousands of women and men, sustaining them in their resistance to the Japanese regime and giving them the courage to face execution. The Jesuits also recorded many stories of female martyrs, such as Blessed Takeda Joana, Blessed Takeda Inês, and Blessed Minami Madalena (all martyred in 1603), Majencia of Kibaru (1614), Blessed Lucía de Freitas (1622), Oiwa Monica (1624) and Masuda Yahagi Madalena (1627). Their images, mirroring the *go Passiom* of Christ and of the virgin martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria, await further scholarly investigation.

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Index Nominum

- Adam 6, 21, 32, 36, 63, 74, 194–195, 240, 290
 Agness (Inès), Takeda, Blessed 493 n. 14,
 507
 Albert the Great 162
 Alciato, Andrea 231, 233–235, 240, 242
 Alcuin 22, 39, 55, 57 n. 59, 67
 Alice of Schaerbeke 503 n. 44
 Ammirato, Scipione 237
 Anastasia, Saint 495
 Anselm of Canterbury, Saint 292–293, 302
 Antonello da Messina 8, 76–77, 94, 105
 Aquinas, Thomas, Saint 3–4, 9, 94, 99,
 161–171, 188, 195, 277, 279–280, 282–283,
 295–296, 330 n. 47
 Aristotle 97, 282, 292
 Augustine, Aurelius, Bishop of Hippo 6–7,
 63, 168, 274, 277–279, 282, 284, 293, 295,
 305, 329–330, 334, 356–357, 474

 Bandinelli, Baccio 471, 473
 Bartholin, Thomas 480
 Bartholomew the Englishman 275, 294,
 298
 Beatus of Liebana 52–53
 Benedict xiv (Benoît xiv), Pope (Prospero
 Lambertini) 462
 Benedict, of Nursia, Saint 416–417, 439–443,
 446, 452–455
 Bernard, of Clairvaux, Saint 81, 267, 270,
 284, 292–293, 298–300, 302, 408–409,
 441, 443, 450
 Bernardino of Siena 82
 Bernini, Gian Lorenzo 8, 99, 101–105
 Bérulle, Pierre de 9–10, 145–147, 149–151, 153,
 253, 255–263
 Binet, Étienne 151, 154
 Bodmer, Johann Jakob 232
 Boethius 41, 46
 Bonaventure 284–285, 300
 Bosch, Hieronymus 11, 371–372, 376–377,
 379–380, 382–385, 388, 390–393
 Boschman, Martin 413–416, 418–419, 421,
 423–425, 428, 432, 435–438, 442, 445,
 447, 449, 455
 Bramante, Donato 345, 352 n. 14
 Breiting, Johann Jakob 232
 Bridget of Sweden (Brigitte de Suède) 481,
 485
 Budé, Guillaume 235

 Calcidius 65, 68
 Calvin, John 7, 9–10, 187–201
 Camus, Jean-Pierre 261
 Capelle, Judoca van der 12, 464
 Caravaggio 11, 341–342, 352, 355, 357, 361,
 363, 367–368, 398–399
 Carello, Sebastiano 94–95, 98
 Carracci, Annibale 92, 138 n. 2, 139
 Casolini, Cristoforo 363
 Catherine of Alexandria, Saint 13, 361, 489,
 499, 503, 507
 Catherine of Siena, Saint 94–95, 503
 Cavalletti, Ermete 341
 Charlemagne 39
 Charles the Bald 17, 21, 25, 32, 39–41, 44,
 49 n. 49, 55, 59–60, 62–65, 67, 72
 Charles v, Holy Roman Emperor 320, 334
 Columbus, Christopher 120
 Conrad of Saxony 299
 Cusa, Nicholas of 177, 205, 208–216, 221–225
 Cyril of Alexandria 326

 Dante Alighieri 298
 David, Gerard 212–214
 Descamps, Jean Baptiste 477
 Dionysius the Aeropagite 151
 Domenichino, *see* Zampieri, Domenico
 Durán, Diego 114–15
 Dürer, Albrecht 211–12, 214, 248, 468–469,
 471

 Eckhart, Meister xiv–xv, 9, 173–178, 180, 185,
 205, 214, 259
 Eldefonsus of Spain 44, 49, 52, 59, 64–65
 Espina, Alphonso de 321–324
 Esther, Queen 268, 288, 300, 331
 Estienne, Henry 236
 Eve 6, 22, 32, 36, 63, 74
 Everaert, Cornelis 10–11, 264–266, 269–274,
 278, 281, 286, 292–302, 306–307
 Eyck, Jan and Hubert van 11, 213, 318, 320
 Eyck, Jan van 11, 213, 318–320

- Ferdinand II of Aragon 320, 334
 Fonseca, Gabriele 8, 99–100, 103, 105
 Fra Angelico 84–85
 Francis de Sales 255, 261
 Freitas, Lucía de, Blessed 507
 Froment, Nicholas 189, 191, 196, 198
 Fulbert of Chartres 292
- Gerini, Niccolò di Pietro 86, 88
 Gerson, Jean 299, 313, 477
 Gibieuf, Guillaume 147 n. 19
 Giovio, Paolo 237
 Gonse, Louis 397–398
 Gramme, Peeter de 392
 Gregory of Nazianzus (Grégoire de Nazianze) 483
 Gregory of Nyssa 328
 Gregory I, the Great, Pope 4, 71, 128, 155, 277
 Greiffenberg, Catharina Regina von 244–249
 Grosseteste, Robert 277, 295, 297, 300, 305
 Grotius, Hugo 13, 483
 Guercino 363, 366
 Gumpenberg, Wilhelm 343 n. 7
- Habert, Germain 146, 149
 Harsdörffer, Georg Philip 238–240, 244
 Heemskerck, Maarten van 468, 471
 Henry IV of Castille 320, 472
 Herder, Johann Gottfried 184, 231
 Herp, Hendrick 184, 222–226
 Hibiya, Monica 493 n. 14
 Hieronymus (Jerome), Saint 292
 Honthorst, Gerrit van 401
 Hosschius, Sidronius 13, 484
 Hugh of Saint-Victor 276
 Hugh of Fouilly 439
- Ignatius, of Loyola, Saint 105, 246, 415, 490
 Irenaeus of Lyon 328
 Isabella I of Castille, Queen 320, 334
- Jean de Carthagène 481
 Jean de Saint-Samson 474, 476
 Joanna of Castile 320, 334
 Johanna (Joana), Takeda, Blessed 507
 John Duns Scotus 300
- John of Damascus 3–4, 165, 189, 195
 Joseph d'Arimathie 473
 Julian of Norwich 503 n. 45
 Junius, Hadrianus 235
- Kostra, Mikołaj, Abbot 416
- Lafréry, Antoine 363
 Langland, William 307
 Lawrence of Hizen (Irmão Lourenço), Brother 492
 Le Brun, Charles 8, 137–139, 142, 144–148, 150, 152–155
 Le Nain Brothers 397
 Leonardo da Vinci 89 n. 27
 Leu, Thomas de 441
 Lorris, Guillaume de 313, 335 n. 67
 Lutgard 503 n. 44
 Luther, Martin 7, 187, 242
 Luzia de la Cruz 493 n. 14
- Magdalene (Madalena), Blessed Minami 507
 Magdalene (Madalena), Masuda Yahagi 507
 Majencia of Kibaru 507
 Mallonio, Daniele 482
 Mantegna, Andrea 477
 Marie de Médicis (Queen of France) 471
 Marina, Saint 495
 Mary of Burgundy 301, 320, 334
 Mary, Blessed Virgin 267, 273, 291, 307
 Master IAM van Zwolle 373, 376
 Maurus, Hrabanus 22, 31, 55, 71, 328
 Maxentius, Emperor 497
 Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor 320, 334
 Meckenem, Israhel van 373
 Memling, Hans 212
 Metaphrastes, Simeon 493
 Meung, Jean de 313–317, 324, 329, 336 n. 67
 Michelangelo (Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni) 122, 139, 145
 Molanus, Johannes 462
 Molinet, Jean 11, 313, 333–336
 Maimonides, Moses 164
 Motolinía, Toribio de Benevente 114 n. 21

- Naitō, Julia 500
 Nicholas of Cusa 177, 205, 208, 221–222
 Nicodemus (Nicodème) 473
 Nihusius, Bartoldus 480
 Nivelon, Claude 137–139, 144–145, 149, 153

 Oiwa, Monica 507
 Olier, Jean-Jacques 147
 Ōta, Julia 493 n. 14
 Ovid (Ovidius), Publius Naso 317, 329

 Paleotti, Alfonso (archevêque de Bologne)
 13, 482
 Paleotti, Gabriele 98
 Pape, Jan de 464
 Paul IV, Pope 130
 Paulinus of Nola 52
 Peter Lombard 164, 270, 292–293
 Peter, Saint 390 n. 21, 403 n. 13
 Peutinger, Konrad 236
 Philip I of Castile (son of Mary of Burgundy
 and Maximilian, Holy Roman
 Emperor) 320, 334
 Piccolomini, Alessandro 97
 Plato 65, 68 n. 80, 275, 277
 Pliny the Elder 407
 Poilly, Nicolas de 147–148
 Porphyrius 497, 505
 Poussin, Nicolas 143, 153–154, 367
 Prodomos, Theodoros 80
 Provoost, Jan 10, 203–208, 211, 214–222,
 224–226
 Pseudo-Dionysius 174, 292, 295
 Pseudo-Jerome 67

 Quintilian (Quintilianus), Marcus Fabius
 236, 241
 Quiroga, Vasco de 124

 Radbertus, Paschasius 62, 64
 Raphael 363
 Reni, Guido 99, 102, 104
 Rhodiginus, Ludovicus Coelius (Lodovico
 Celio Ricchieri) 236
 Richard of Saint-Victor 274–275, 284
 Richeome, Louis 254, 343
 Riemenschneider, Tilman 388–389
 Robert of Molesme 440

 Roovere, Anthonis de 224
 Rubens, Peter Paul 463–465, 472, 475–476,
 479
 Ruusbroec, Jan van 10, 203, 216–226, 280

 Sahagún, Bernardino de 109, 120
 Saint-Jure, Jean-Baptiste 138
 Sandt, Nicolas van der 356
 Sansovino, Andrea 345, 363
 Sansovino, Jacopo 363–364
 Scannelli, Francesco 367 n. 45
 Scheyfve, Jan 392
 Scholastica, Saint 441–442
 Scribani, Charles 484
 Séguier, Pierre 138 n. 3, 146
 Sixtus V, Pope 341
 Solomon 264, 292 n. 164
 Surius, Laurentius 493, 497
 Suso, Henry 176–185, 259
 Sylvius, Henri 474

 Tegernsee, Brothers of the Benedictine
 abbey of 208–209, 225
 Teresa of Avila 359
 Theodulf of Orléan 36
 Thomas Aquinas, Saint (*see* Aquinas,
 Thomas, Saint)
 Tōin, Vincent (Irmão Vicente Tōin, Hōin or
 Vicente Vilela), Brother 493, 506
 Tokugawa, Hidetada 507
 Tokugawa, Iemitsu 507
 Tokugawa, Ieyasu 507
 Torquemada, Juan de 323–324, 331 n. 50
 Tosini, Michele 361–362
 Tour, Georges de la 12, 397–398, 402
 Toyotomi, Hideyoshi 507

 Valadés, Diego 117
 Valois, Adrien 478, 480–481
 Venanzi, Giovanni 94, 96, 98–99
 Vitalis, Orderic 440
 Voragine, Jacobus de 497

 Wesel, Adriaen van 391
 Wierix, Antoon III 357–358
 Wierix, Hieronymus 423, 425, 430, 435–436,
 438, 444–445, 449
 William of Auvergne 167 n. 11

William of Saint-Thierry 284
Wizo, Candidus 67

Xavier, Francis, Saint 489

Yôho, Paul (Irmão Yofo Paulo), Brother 493
n. 18

Zwingli, Huldrych 187